





VESPER DRAMAS

VESPER DRAMAS

By

MARCUS BACH

WITH WORSHIP PROGRAMS

By

WILLIAM H. LEACH

Editor, Church Management



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To
Elizabeth Kirkpatrick
patron of the fine arts in religion

EDW. 11/30/39

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INTRODUCTION

A notable phenomenon in the church field during the past decade has been the consistently growing interest in religious drama and in secular drama suitable for presentation in the church chancel. This interest has revealed itself in the increasing number of religious dramatic groups, and of important literary productions designed for such presentation.

Marcus Bach is one of the most talented and distinguished writers in this field. He has, perhaps to a greater degree than anyone else, studied the religious dramas of all faiths. He has caught the beauty of worship and with rare instinctiveness has incorporated it in plays that appeal to the contemporary spiritual sense.

The plays in this volume have been selected with the idea of corporate worship in mind. Although varied in theme and material, they all bear the imprint of a distinct mood and tempo. It is this almost musical quality within the dramas which makes them so desirable for vesper hour presentation. The director should seek to ascertain and interpret the pace of each particular play. With the possible exception of "The Curse o' God" the plays are designed for church chancel presentation. The church service of today had its origin in drama — an origin which is obvious in the Catholic mass and in many aspects of Protestant services. The use of drama in the service of worship is consistent with the highest ideals.

Churches seeking to preserve the spirit of worship and, at the same time, to maintain a respectable attendance for the second service of the day, will find these vesper dramas a logical and dignified means of attaining their goal. Each play has a distinct spiritual message. While the players themselves may re-

ceive the greatest benefit from the productions, the entire congregation will benefit by the inspiration of worship which is the purpose of the service.

My own contribution to the volume is very slight. It has consisted in selecting music and liturgical materials so that a unified program might be readily available to churches and ministers interested in the medium of drama. It is the hope of the authors that they may find in this volume worship material of beauty and effectiveness.

WILLIAM H. LEACH.

CRAFTSMAN OF GALILEE

CHARACTERS

MOLDAHO (Möldä'hō), *craftsman of Palestine*

GEDA (Gē'dä), *his son*

DAPORAN (Dăpōr'än), *an officer of Judea*

NOADAIAH (Nōadai'äh), *friend of Moldaho*

AN OLD MAN

VOICE OF THE CRAFTSMAN OF GALILEE

VOICES OF CROWDS

SINGING CHORUS

The following drama is designed for presentation in the manner of a radio broadcast. Churches complaining of lack of equipment, limited time for rehearsals, depleted budgets which forbid settings or special costumes, will find this form of production unique and adaptable, and all groups, whether amateur or aspiring to professionalism, will find it highly effective and inspirational. The only properties required are a microphone and material for sound effects.

The drama is introduced with a word of explanation, as follows:

“For the next few minutes this platform will be converted into a broadcasting studio, and you will be permitted to see and hear a radio presentation entitled ‘Craftsman of Galilee.’ This drama is written by Marcus Bach, and is presented to you by [name of group], through the courtesy of [name of church].”



CRAFTSMAN OF GALILEE

ORGAN PRELUDE, *toward the close of which the ANNOUNCER and the CAST enter.*

ANNOUNCER (*speaking into the microphone as the ORGAN fades*). Among the chalk-cliffs of the Jordan valley lived Moldaho, craftsman of Palestine, and his son Geda. Their home was farthest from the river, beyond the area usually inundated by the floods of early spring. Moldaho often said, "Give God room. Intrude not and thou shalt live in peace. His wisdom is in the waters."

So he built his hut westward "out of God's way."

One summer's evening, while Moldaho was still in his workshop, a horseman appeared in the pass in the hills, wound his way between the straggling dwellings, and without hesitation rode to the house of the craftsman.

(ORGAN *silent. Knock is heard.*)

MOLDAHO (*darkly*). Who is there?

DAPORAN (*from without, some distance from microphone*). An officer of Judea; let me in.

MOLDAHO. An officer?

DAPORAN. One sent from Marcus Ambivius, the governor.

MOLDAHO. Hm-m. It has been some time since a messenger of the governor has knocked at the door of Moldaho. . . . Well, one moment; I will let down the bar. (*Sound of lifting of wooden bolt and opening of door.*) There. (*Astonished and apologetic*) Thy uniform is that of the governor's guard. I thought. . . .

DAPORAN. I am an officer as I said. Daporan by name, son of Hur.

MOLDAHO. Come in, esteemed Daporan. I will send my son to take care of thy horse.

DAPORAN. My horse may stand outside. (*Then*) So this is your workshop, eh? I have heard of it. How is the craft?

MOLDAHO. It wants but wisdom and a steady hand, my friend; both of which I lack.

DAPORAN (*sagaciously, but without condescension*). Thou art not lacking in humility, that's a fact. My orders to seek you told me otherwise.

MOLDAHO (*smiling*). Wagging tongues, good sir, praise me to my friends and flay me to my enemies.

DAPORAN. Moldaho, I was told that you are highest among the craftsmen of Judea. The governor said your eyes were keen, your brain alive with art, your hands tuned to the knife. (*Abruptly*) Well, they'd better be.

MOLDAHO. What brings thee here, sir?

DAPORAN. If we can have a light, I'll tell you. I have a scroll here in my belt.

MOLDAHO. One moment, sir. Night comes upon the valley suddenly. A moment ago it was —

DAPORAN (*impatiently*). I know, I know. Bring the light.

MOLDAHO. Here, sir, this torch will shed some light upon the bench. Let me brush this dust aside . . . there.

DAPORAN (*sound of unrolling of scroll*). Hold the top of this scroll, will you?

MOLDAHO. Yea, sir.

DAPORAN. Can you see this diagram?

MOLDAHO. Yea, clearly. It is an artist's work. What is the —

DAPORAN. Well, old man, I'll tell you what this is. It is the plan for a death-dealing catapult first designed by Baldan of Herodium.

MOLDAHO (*aghast*). Baldan of Herodium!

DAPORAN. Why do you draw away?

MOLDAHO (*disturbed*). Why, Baldan died not long ago in the city of his fathers. He was a master craftsman, too, for I recall how. . . .

DAPORAN. If he had any talent he put it into this device. It is an instrument of war surpassing any in the world. It is sure, destructive, and deadly. Tiberius wants them set in all his kingdoms and estates.

MOLDAHO (*thoughtfully*). It was this that Baldan conceived before he died . . . an instrument of death . . . a catapult.

DAPORAN (*ruthlessly*). Well, he's dead now, Moldaho. And, dying, left only this plan and a few fragments of wood in his shop. He might as well have taken them with him for all the good they do anyone.

MOLDAHO. Thou meanest — ?

DAPORAN. I mean, Moldaho, that until someone can complete these plans and actually make a catapult that will throw a beam with accuracy, Baldan's work is of no great account.

MOLDAHO (*involuntarily*). I see he hath recorded some dimensions at the bottom of the scroll.

DAPORAN (*abruptly*). Moldaho, the governor has a task for you!

MOLDAHO (*astounded*). Not, of a truth, to finish Baldan's work?

DAPORAN. Yea, that is it. The order comes directly from the hand of Tiberius Claudius Nero!

MOLDAHO (*aghast*). Our emperor!

DAPORAN. What do you think, old man? He has commanded all his governors to search their provinces for men skilled in craftsmanship; someone to complete and build the catapult of Baldan of Herodium!

MOLDAHO. And — and thou has come unto me?

DAPORAN. Yea. Because Ambivius, our governor, will recompense both of us if you have the genius to build the thing.

MOLDAHO (*slowly*). An instrument of death.

DAPORAN. And fame to you and me, as well as honor for all Judea. It is a ladder worth climbing, Moldaho. When will you begin?

MOLDAHO (*hesitantly*). I fear, my friend.

DAPORAN (*incredulously*). What?

MOLDAHO. Yea, my friend, I fear the art of Baldan.

DAPORAN. What do you mean?

MOLDAHO. 'Twas said among our craft that never anyone could work with Baldan's plans and live!

DAPORAN (*laughing*). The old Herodium prophecy! By the head of Nero, you're a greater fool than I dreamed!

MOLDAHO. Pray do not make light of it. Hast thou not heard how —

DAPORAN. I'll wager that you fear the spilling of salt, the cry of a cricket, the circle round the moon! (*He laughs.*)

MOLDAHO. Hast thou not heard how it befell the men who —

DAPORAN. This is a task set by the governor, yea, by the Emperor Tiberius! You speak of signs and prophecies! Come, set your mind to work. There's fame and fortune in the task for both of us!

MOLDAHO (*involuntarily*). Fame! Fortune!

DAPORAN (*with persuasion*). You're growing old. Jehovah has sent this mission that you may leave the world a token of your art. "The Catapult of Moldaho" it will be called! What do you say?

MOLDAHO (*half afraid*). I see wherein the plans could be improved, but —

DAPORAN. Good, old man! 'Tis well indeed! Then put your head and hand to the task!

MOLDAHO. Yea. . . .

DAPORAN. I tell you there'll be wealth in it! And a journey to Ambivius! His guards will escort you to the palace of Tiberius Claudius Nero! Think on it!

MOLDAHO (*impressed*). Here in the valley they will turn their eyes to me!

DAPORAN. And cry, "Long live Moldaho, for he is greater than Baldan of Herodium!"

MOLDAHO. Craftsman of Palestine!

DAPORAN. Friend of Tiberius!

MOLDAHO. It is, as thou hast said, a ladder worth climbing.

DAPORAN. In truth! You will consent?

MOLDAHO (*pausing; then suddenly*). Yea, I will consent!

DAPORAN. Good! You'll start at once! At once, Moldaho; and in a fortnight I'll return. God prosper you, old man, and guard you in your task!

(*ORGAN louder, completing first episode and denoting lapse of time over several days, which fact is brought out in continuity.*)

MOLDAHO (*grumbling to himself; ORGAN fades again*). Jehovah sheds no light upon it! Ah, that I should be confounded at a task! (*Sound of working with wood.*)

GEDA (*sound of entrance*). Father.

MOLDAHO (*none too gently*). Well, what is it, Geda?

GEDA. What progress hast thou made this morning?

MOLDAHO (*grimly*). None . . . none! God has hid himself from sight.

GEDA. I see thou hast the model there upon the ground. It is a sturdy looking instrument and should be well enough to throw a beam.

MOLDAHO (*with a touch of disdain*). Yea, there it stands; the catapult for Tiberius. And into it has gone five days of labor, from morn to night, and night to morn.

GEDA (*gently*). I'll help thee if —

MOLDAHO (*exasperated*). Help me with what? By the prophets, I can go no further. I have yet to find a wood that will be flexible enough to undergo the strain whereto it will be put.

GEDA (*imploringly*). Come, father —

MOLDAHO (*revealing that he has become hardened and unsympathetic since working on the catapult*). Ah, do not weary me! I'll think on this until I get some light on it. (*Excited approach of someone.*) Who comes in such haste?

NOADAIAH (*breathlessly*). Moldaho! Moldaho! I have great news for thee!

MOLDAHO. Say on, Noadaiah. What brings thee here?

NOADAIAH. Thou told'st me yesternight of thy difficulty in discovering a proper combination for the shaft in the catapult, how Daporan had put his faith in thee and how thou art baffled at thy task.

GEDA. We still have many days till his return —

MOLDAHO (*exasperated*). Hang thy patience, Geda!

GEDA. See, Noadaiah, how ill at ease he has become since taking on the building of the instrument of death? At meals he is silent, at night he tosses on his bed —

MOLDAHO. Yea, and at time of prayer I cry unto the Lord! And all for nought! The God of Abraham and Jacob hath forsaken me!

GEDA. What is thy message, Noadaiah?

NOADAIAH. I have wherewith to help thee, Moldaho, wherewith to find the secret thou hast sought in vain!

MOLDAHO. What sayest thou? What dost thou mean?

NOADAIAH (*confidentially*). Hearken. Hast heard, Moldaho, of the work-fellow of Nazareth?

MOLDAHO. Of Nazareth? Nay.

NOADAIAH. 'Tis said that he is of all men the best informed in the art of building. I have today seen a yoke and plow that came from his shop. I tell thee he hath made them faultlessly.

GEDA. What were they like, Noadaiah?

MOLDAHO. Well, let him finish.

NOADAIAH. Never hath man seen such a creation. A plow,

I tell thee, with a handle to guide it along the furrows! A perfect share as man hath ever seen!

MOLDAHO. And thou hast thought that — ?

NOADAIAH. That this fellow would know the flexibility of wood which might perfect thy catapult!

GEDA. Aye, of a truth!

MOLDAHO. Him I would see! What is his name?

NOADAIAH. I only know he lives in Nazareth. In Nazareth of Galilee.

MOLDAHO. Him we must seek without delay! (*Then*) Ah, but I am old — no longer fit for journeying. It is no small distance to Nazareth.

NOADAIAH. Hearken, Moldaho. I thought if Geda so agreed, we could make the journey together, he and I.

GEDA. In truth!

MOLDAHO. A happy thought, my friend! Geda, thou shalt go to Nazareth of Galilee and from this young craftsman learn the secret of the catapult!

GEDA. And thou'lt go with me, Noadaiah?

NOADAIAH. Yea.

MOLDAHO (*happily*). Thou art as a brother, Noadaiah! Thou shalt be famous with me when the task is done! Jehovah bless thee!

GEDA. We'll leave at dawn?

MOLDAHO (*ecstatically*). The prophets' God be praised! The Almighty hath heard my prayers! Day and night have I cried to him, now hath he answered me!

NOADAIAH. We must not let our eagerness rob us of our senses; we must prepare for the journey while it is still day.

MOLDAHO (*solemnly*). Geda.

GEDA. Yea, father.

MOLDAHO. Look at me, my son.

GEDA. Yea?

MOLDAHO. Swear to me, Geda, that thou wilt not return until the secret hath been learned.

GEDA. Even though Daporan return to thee before — ?

MOLDAHO. Even so. I'll bid him wait, since no one else hath yet achieved our end. Wilt thou swear this to me, Geda?

GEDA. Yea, father, I swear it! I'll not return from Nazareth until the craftsman there hath given me the secret for the instrument of death!

(*ORGAN louder, denoting lapse of time; music is noble and spirited. VOICES of a crowd in the street, murmuring, anxiety, eagerness.*)

NOADAIAH (*jocularly*). Well, Geda, it seems as though all Nazareth were out to welcome us.

GEDA. I wish such were the case, Noadaijah, for it might be easier for us to find this craftsman's shop. But everyone seems eager, yea, even alarmed. No one so much as looks at us. Hath there been rumor of war, or —

NOADAIAH. If there had, I'll wager that Tiberius would pay double for his catapult!

GEDA. Aye, that he would.

NOADAIAH. I have oft wanted to ask thee on our journey, Geda, hast ever heard of the prophecy concerning Baldan of Herodium?

GEDA. Nay.

NOADAIAH. Therefore did I want to help thy father with the plans, because. . . .

GEDA. What is it, Noadaijah?

NOADAIAH. 'Twas said of old, they tell me, that no one could work on Baldan's plans and live!

GEDA. What!

NOADAIAH. There's no truth in it, of course. But if one thinks on these things too seriously they oft —

GEDA. Why hast thou not told me this before?

NOADAIAH. Thy father forbade me.

GEDA. He knew of it!

NOADAIAH. I told thee only that it would speed our search for this craftsman of Galilee.

GEDA (*half to himself*). No one can work on Baldan's plans and live!

NOADAIAH. Come, Geda. See, there is an old man in the doorway of that straggly dwelling. Let us inquire of him.

GEDA (*while they apparently walk along*). I am distressed, Noadaiah! Thy words — these crowds of whispering men — the tiresome journey which brought us here — I —

NOADAIAH. Think on it no more. Come along.

GEDA (*thoughtfully*). My father knew of it and yet he laid his hand to the task! He seeks to make an instrument of death. . . .

NOADAIAH. Here is the old man. Let us go into the doorway where he sits. (*VOICES of crowd fade out.*) Peace to thee, stranger!

OLD MAN (*in a disgruntled manner*). Is it peace?

NOADAIAH. Yea. We have but lately come from Betharabah.

OLD MAN. Betharabah?

NOADAIAH. A town in the Jordan valley.

OLD MAN. Mm-hm.

GEDA. We seek a certain craftsman of Nazareth. 'Tis said he maketh all things well!

OLD MAN (*always in a low, disturbed tone*). There are many such in Nazareth.

NOADAIAH. He whom we seek but lately sent a yoke to Betharabah.

OLD MAN. What is his name?

NOADAIAH. We do not know. They only said he lived in Nazareth of Galilee.

GEDA. We must find him at once.

OLD MAN. Mm-hm.

GEDA. Where does he live?

OLD MAN. From your words he might live anywhere. How should I know? You are not sure whom ye seek.

NOADAIAH. Is there not one craftsman here who is mightier than the rest?

OLD MAN. There was one a fortnight ago: Joseph's son, a carpenter.

GEDA. There *was*?

OLD MAN. Mm-hm.

GEDA. Where is he now?

NOADAIAH. A noted craftsman, was he?

OLD MAN. Mm-hm. He made a plow, 'tis said, which could be guided in the furrows.

NOADAIAH. Yea, 'tis he!

GEDA. Where is he now?

OLD MAN. Do you behold those crowds around yonder mount?

NOADAIAH. Yea, there in the distance.

OLD MAN. They, too, are waiting for the craftsman you would see, Joseph's son.

GEDA. But — why? What hath he done?

OLD MAN. This is a generation that runs after dreams; that loves to worship those who can expound some new philosophy and creed. (*With evidence of spite*) They've heard the craftsman can work miracles; that he once lengthened a beam-of wood with his hand. They speak in whispers now and walk about with stupid smiles upon their mouths. The half of them are mad.

GEDA. He lengthened a beam?

NOADAIAH. 'Tis he whom we seek!

OLD MAN. The son of Joseph, a carpenter's son, that's what he is! The young these days are not content to learn their father's craft. They must be priests, philosophers, miracle-workers.

GEDA (*entranced*). He lengthened a beam!

OLD MAN. Well, say not that I believe it! You act as though he *had* performed it well enough! Now, I for one — (*Singing starts in the distance*).

GEDA. Listen!

NOADAIAH. What's that?

OLD MAN (*disgusted*). The world is mad! They sing to carpenters! Bah!

GEDA. It's beautiful! Do you hear?

OLD MAN. Of course I hear! Too clearly! I'll go into the house and —

GEDA (*excitedly*). Look thou, Noadaijah, that must be he!

NOADAIAH. Where?

GEDA. There, that man in white, ascending the mount!

NOADAIAH. Yea, I see him. Let us get closer to him — hurry!

GEDA. Can we get to him through the crowd?

NOADAIAH. We'll get him off alone somewhere and talk to him. (*Sound of crowd increases. Singing is more distinct.*)

GEDA. Wait a moment!

NOADAIAH. Why?

GEDA. We can't get past this multitude. There are men and women all about him.

NOADAIAH. We can get through.

GEDA. Wait! He is raising his hand. The singing has stopped. Everyone is watching him.

NOADAIAH. There's something strange about him.

GEDA. He's going to speak — listen!

VOICE (*while all is hushed*). Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed

are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which —

GEDA (*whispering, while the VOICE continues in the distance*). Do you hear, Noadaiah? Did you hear those words? “Blessed are the peacemakers, . . . they shall be called the children of God.”

NOADAIAH. He hath power over these people, that’s sure!

GEDA (*profoundly*). The children of God!

NOADAIAH. Listen, Geda.

VOICE (*distinctly*). Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the —

GEDA (*as VOICE again fades; aghast*). Why do you stare that way?

(*ORGAN up. The music is mysterious, with a touch of triumph, again denoting a lapse of time.*)

MOLDAHO (*his voice shaken with emotion and anger*). And you stand in my workshop and tell me you have come from Nazareth without the secret for the catapult!

NOADAIAH (*soothingly*). He could do nothing else, Moldaho.

GEDA. Nay, father, I could do nothing else! If thou hadst heard him on the mount, how he said —

MOLDAHO (*agitated*). Stop it!

NOADAIAH. Come, Moldaho.

MOLDAHO (*threateningly*). I sent thee, Geda, trusting thee. Thou didst swear to me upon this very spot that thou wouldst not return without the information that I sought.

GEDA. "Love your enemies," he said; "bless them that curse you!"

MOLDAHO (*viciously persistent*). Didst thou not swear to me?

GEDA. Yea, father.

MOLDAHO. Before God?

GEDA. I did not know that —

MOLDAHO. Before God?

GEDA. Yea! But he seemed as one sent from God!

NOADAIAH. The multitudes worshiped him. The world will hear of him, Moldaho!

MOLDAHO. Silence! You know perhaps that Daporan returns this night to see the finished catapult! There it stands — upon the floor — complete, yet imperfect. That beam within its trough can be propelled a hundred cubits, nothing more. What is that? It should propel it with the speed of lightning — with accuracy — yea, that it might destroy and kill!

GEDA. When I heard him speak, father, I thought of the futility of war! His message breathed of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers," he proclaimed, "for they shall be called the children of God!"

NOADAIAH. "Do good to them that hate you!" he said.

MOLDAHO. Thou hast betrayed me!

GEDA. Had you but been there with us! Is not this talk of peace a greater mission than our craft?

MOLDAHO (*grimly*). So this is my reward for trusting thee! I would the prophecy of Baldan were fulfilled on thee — my son!

GEDA (*astounded*). Father!

NOADAIAH (*affrighted*). Moldaho, think on thy words!

MOLDAHO (*crazily*). Ye have betrayed me, to bring me to shame!

GEDA. Nay!

MOLDAHO (*as before*). There is a beam there in the catapult,

ready to be flung! The brace holds the propeller-shaft; the twisted cords could snap if I would hurl this piece of wood against it! See this wood within my hand? (*He laughs insanely.*)

GEDA. Father! Put that down!

MOLDAHO. God curse thee, Geda! For thou wouldst listen to a craftsman out of Galilee, rather than to Moldaho of Beth-arabah!

NOADAIAH. Moldaho! Drop that wood!

MOLDAHO (*irrationally*). Why? — Why, Noadaiiah? (*Viciously*) Thou, too, hast gone the way of the faithless! My hope for fame for me and all Judea, thou hast brought to nought! Thou and he — my son!

GEDA. There is a better way, father!

MOLDAHO (*unheeding*). And Daporan will scowl, and curse, and laugh! Yea, he will laugh! (*He laughs crazily; then, in a frenzy*) Can I hit it? Can I spring the catapult with this wood, think you, Geda?

GEDA. Father!

NOADAIAH. Drop that, Moldaho!

MOLDAHO. Nay, I will throw it! Is not this the prophecy of Baldan! (*He throws the stick. It is heard to strike the catapult; the beam is loosed and propelled against the body of* MOLDAHO. *He falls with a shriek.*)

NOADAIAH. It hit him! He is killed!

GEDA. Father. . . .

(*ORGAN up immediately for closing musical effect.*)

ANNOUNCER (*after some moments while ORGAN plays pianissimo*). You have just listened to a drama entitled "Craftsman of Galilee," brought to you by [name of group] from the auditorium of the [name of church.] (*Other remarks, ad. lib.*)

ORGAN up for postlude.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Cantilena" *Demarest*

SILENCE, *for a space*

After a few moments for personal meditation, the leader says:

Blessed are they that keep his testimonies and that seek him with the whole heart.

THE LORD'S PRAYER, *in unison*

HYMN: "Immortal Love, Forever Full" *Whittier*

RESPONSIVE READING

Leader:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast."

Congregation:

I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad.
I found in him a resting-place,
And he has made me glad.

Leader:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water! Thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live."

Congregation:

I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.

Leader:

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
 "I am this dark world's light;
 Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
 And all the day be bright."

Congregation:

I looked to Jesus and I found
 In him my star, my sun;
 And in that light of life I'll walk,
 Till traveling days are done.

PRAYER

Eternal, Holy, Almighty, whose name is Love, we are met in solemn company to seek thy face, and in spirit and truth to worship thy name. We come in deep humility, since thou art so high and exalted, and because thou beholdest the proud from afar off. We come in the name and spirit of Jesus to make our wills one with thine; to abandon our lonely and selfish walk for solemn communion with thee; to put an end to sin by welcoming to our hearts thy holy presence. Deeper than we have known, enter, thou Maker of our souls; clearer than we have seen, dawn the glory on our sight. Light the flame upon the altar, call forth the incense of prayer, waken the song of praise, and manifest thyself to all. Amen. — *W. E. Orchard*

OFFERTORY

CHOIR ANTHEM AND SOLO: "Beautiful Saviour" *Christiansen*

HYMN: "O Christ the Way" *Dykes*

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Finale in D Minor" *Matthews*

BENEDICTION, *while the postlude is being played:*

Now may the spirit of the Galilean, whose words are truth and whose life is love, guard, guide, and keep you evermore. Amen.

ABOVE THESE VOICES

CHARACTERS

DIONYSIUS, *a young man*

A MELIORIST, *middle-aged*

A FANATIC, *an aged man*

A STOIC (HANAN), *a young man*

MEN *and* WOMEN *of Athens*

AN EPICUREAN (AGAR), *middle-aged*

A BLIND MAN

DAMARIS, *a young woman*

PAUL, *the apostle, about
thirty-six*

A BEGGAR

Scene: The Court of the Areopagites on Mars Hill, Athens.

Time: About 50 A.D.

This drama is especially attractive for outdoor presentation, although it may be effectively presented in the church chancel or on the parish stage.

The scene represents the Court of the Areopagites on Mars Hill in Athens, a spot "far removed from the hum of the busy world below; where men might hear in peace what the newest of enthusiasts had to say." Here, we are told, "the Athenians and strangers spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing."

At the back are stone seats or benches for the council. On either side is a table built in the form of an altar. The one at players' right is for the accused, the one at left for the accuser. Trees flank the scene and suggestions of walls run off at right and left. Two entrances, one at each side, admit to the court.

ABOVE THESE VOICES

At this moment the regular Council of Areopagites is not in session. Two seats only are occupied: one by a MELIORIST, the other by an EPICUREAN. Both are men of middle age, well fed and comfortable looking. Other MEN and WOMEN stand around, among them young DIONYSIUS, a young woman DAMARIS, an aged FANATIC, and a BLIND MAN. A crippled BEGGAR sits statue-like near the entrance at left. The light is that of late afternoon.

DIONYSIUS. It seems to me, Agar, that this is all very ridiculous.

EPICUREAN. What, my friend?

DIONYSIUS. We have gathered here on Mars Hill for many years. But instead of growing religious we grow lazy.

MELIORIST (*with languor*). Perhaps, my dear Dionysius, that is the fruit of true religion. You call it laziness, we call it leisure.

BLIND MAN (*leaning forward upon his staff*). Ye who see the gods! Give heed! Doth Diana ever toil? Or doth she still stand where the silversmith hath set her?

MELIORIST (*turning to him*). Who speaks of Diana on Mars Hill?

FANATIC. I hear wings beating over my head. I hear the gods preparing for war. There is a veil of blood over the sun.

EPICUREAN. Go on, Dionysius.

DIONYSIUS (*intently, to the FANATIC*). You hear gods preparing for war?

FANATIC. I see Diana fall from her throne and Jupiter shattered against the stones. Athens trembles!

EPICUREAN. He is possessed. Mars Hill is fast becoming a refuge for the rabble.

DAMARIS. And why not? Dionysius is right. We have become lazy in our religion. We spend our time in vain babblings and foolish discourses.

DIONYSIUS. True, Damaris, I am beginning to believe that that religion is dead which does not express itself in deeds and brotherhood.

EPICUREAN. A fine world this would be if everyone would try to force his idea of brotherhood on his fellows. Things will move to ultimate perfection if we only give them a chance. I seek religion, not for the sake of religion but as a means to happiness.

BLIND MAN. If there are gods in Athens tell them to touch my eyes!

FANATIC. Great is Diana! But greater is the silversmith who fashioned her. Shall I sing of Diana? I sang once and her temple burned in Ephesus.

MELIORIST. Will you stop that?

EPICUREAN. What is religion? It is man's supreme good. What is the supreme good? *Self*. Self is the highest expression of the gods.

DAMARIS. And selfishness the lowest form of vice.

DIONYSIUS. My friends, we have built beautiful temples and erected splendid statues. We have gods of gold and silver and graven stone. But our lives still go on in emptiness and strife.

DAMARIS. It is written that gods cannot be made with hands or by man's device.

DIONYSIUS (*coming to the altar at left and facing them*). Where is the god who made us? Where is the god who can open blinded eyes?

FANATIC (*to the BLIND MAN*). Do you hear that, sightless one? You are to *see*! He forgets you have stones for eyes.

DAMARIS. Some eyes of flesh see less!

DIONYSIUS. If the world looks to Mars Hill for a livable phi-

losophy we must admit we have failed. And the world does look to us. It sits like yonder beggar, deaf, dumb, but waiting. (*They turn in the direction of the BEGGAR.*)

EPICUREAN. How dramatic, Dionysius! How have you escaped the theater?

MELIORIST. One of our philosophers writes, "Man himself makes his heaven and his earth." That is a profound truth.

BLIND MAN. Who made my world? Not I! Who plunged me into this darkness? If I could make my world I'd make it free from pain.

EPICUREAN. Well, you can't.

FANATIC. If I could make a world I'd make the trees bear gold and the rivers run with wine.

BLIND MAN (*turning uncertainly in their direction*). Rather make the road kind beneath our feet.

MELIORIST. Will you hold your tongues!

EPICUREAN (*deprecatingly*). Take what the gods have given you and be content.

DIONYSIUS. I long for a religion that ties itself to some great ideal.

BLIND MAN. I long for a religion that will give me light.

DIONYSIUS (*gently*). A man once walked in Galilee who opened blinded eyes.

BLIND MAN. He walked, aye! So it is said. But lo! he died, not like a god, but like a thief!

DIONYSIUS. Some say he was the Jews' messiah.

MELIORIST (*mockingly*). Some say!

DAMARIS. He came unto his own and his own knew him not.

EPICUREAN. If Damaris can prophesy she is content. Listen, all of you! We Epicureans believe that man has been endowed with tastes, appetites, desires that should be satisfied. If not, why did the gods give them to us? Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!

DIONYSIUS. That were well had we not learned the fallacy of it. Your theory leads too easily to overindulgence and suffering.

MELIORIST. Life is best when it harmonizes with nature. We do not need much more religion than that.

BLIND MAN. It is well enough for you to speak of philosophies, but I want something that can make me see. Since men have failed I must look to a god. Which god? You cannot tell me even that.

DAMARIS. We seek.

BLIND MAN. You know no torment, you who can see. Throughout this endless night I think of nothing save that some miracle will tear these scales from my eyes.

FANATIC. Say no more or I will blind myself out of pity for you. This is a day evil enough. I see blood dripping from the sun.

BLIND MAN. Be thankful thou canst see the sun.

EPICUREAN. Stop making us miserable.

BLIND MAN. Be thankful thou canst see the sky over thy head, and trees, and friends.

FANATIC. Hear that, Athenians! The fellow thinks a friend is to be seen! I see no friend. The world is bereft. There is no friend but wealth these days. It will not always be so. I see a sword thrust out of Judea.

MELIORIST (*wearily*). The world would be happy if it were half as credulous as you.

DIONYSIUS (*trying to gain their attention again*). The world always looks for a religion that works miracles.

MELIORIST. The height of paganism!

DAMARIS. The miracle of the true religion will be that it teaches men how to live.

EPICUREAN (*dryly*). You speak almost like a Christian. (*A number laugh at this.*)

FANATIC (*speaking excitedly*). I was in Antioch twelve days

ago and heard strange things. Men stood on street corners turning the world upside down.

DAMARIS. You were in Antioch?

FANATIC. A day of drunkenness. Men sang and women prayed. Caesar was forgotten. A thousand knelt in the street and two thousand were baptized in the streams. Caesar's name was not heard. Devils ran in the market places. The dead awoke. I saw the sun stand still! (*The others stare at him.*)

MELIORIST. Well, would you all become Jews?

DIONYSIUS. We would become men.

DAMARIS. We would follow truth.

BLIND MAN. Were there miracles?

FANATIC. Is it not a miracle for the sun to stand still in the heavens?

EPICUREAN (*rising*). I have no interest in this blasphemy. If you want to be deluded, well and good. I'll have none of it.

MELIORIST (*preparing to follow AGAR*). Nor I. (*To DIONYSIUS*) You, Dionysius, a member of the council, joining in these affairs!

DIONYSIUS. If you have never known want in body or soul you will not understand. If you have never seen the world languishing under the rule of whimsical gods, this is all foolishness.

EPICUREAN (*who has moved over to the BEGGAR preparatory to departing*). Well, beggar, how is your trade?

FANATIC (*moving to the gate at right*). Great is Diana! Great is Jupiter!

BLIND MAN. Light! Light! Are there no gods in Athens?

DIONYSIUS (*to the MELIORIST*). I am not thinking only of myself. I think of Athens — of the world. . . . Without truth no people can endure.

EPICUREAN. What is truth, philosopher?

DIONYSIUS. Truth is that which leads us from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.

FANATIC (*wildly, looking off right*). See them below at the

gates! Who is this that comes? He has a sword in his hand and flames of fire on his tongue. His eyes are like stars!

BLIND MAN (*groping his way*). Which way? Which way?

DAMARIS (*moving toward right with others*). There by the outer court.

MELIORIST. A new face on Mars Hill.

FANATIC (*in a loud voice*). Let all the world be silent now!

MELIORIST. If your brain were half as active as your tongue! (*Then*) He is a Jew.

EPICUREAN. A Jew?

DIONYSIUS. Hanan, the Stoic, is with him.

BLIND MAN. Hath he a god in his hands? Tell me, are there phylacteries about his neck? Hath he a staff?

DAMARIS (*quietly*). Silence now.

(PAUL appears, accompanied by a young STOIC, HANAN. PAUL is about thirty-six years of age, a strong figure. He studies them quietly during the following conversation. A number of people enter with the two.)

MELIORIST. Good-day, Hanan. And who is this?

STOIC. Good peace. You've heard, no doubt, of those who stirred the populace in Berea?

EPICUREAN. Indeed. . . .

STOIC. This is the foremost of the preaching band. Come here, Jew! (PAUL views him quietly, his eyes then turn to the FANATIC and finally rest on DIONYSIUS.)

FANATIC. 'Tis he of Antioch! They drove him from the city. Beware of him! He is a sorcerer!

STOIC. Hold your tongue. (*To PAUL*) Well, Jew, you find yourself on Mars Hill, which is the throne of learning. What have you to say?

DIONYSIUS (*in a low voice*). Yea, speak to us. (PAUL goes over to the BEGGAR and gives him a coin.)

MELIORIST (*meanwhile to HANAN*). Why did you bring him here?

STOIC. I heard him speaking in the market place below. He so confounded our followers and yours, Agar, that I asked him to come with me to the Areopagus. See how Dionysius watches him.

FANATIC. Paul! 'Tis he! He left the city in a cloud. The sun was darkened and the sky was filled with blood!

BLIND MAN. Paul! . . . Paul, give me my sight in the name of thy great God! Light for my blinded eyes!

STOIC. Think only of yourself, cripple.

DIONYSIUS. Will you not speak to us?

STOIC. Speak, Jew! (*PAUL looks at him intently.*)

MELIORIST. So you are Paul. So you are he who now stands with those he once persecuted. You preach about the Galilean, is that it?

STOIC. He preaches Jesus — and the resurrection.

EPICUREAN. The resurrection! (*He laughs.*)

FANATIC (*crazily*). Well, tell me, when this beggar lives again will he still be a brute whose jaws and ears are locked? When this blind man is resurrected will he still have stones for eyes? (*AGAR and the MELIORIST laugh; others join them.*)

BLIND MAN. Stop it! Stop laughing!

EPICUREAN. The one possessed has spoken with unusual sense. Tell us, Paul, what are these tangled philosophies you have been setting forth to our Athenians?

MELIORIST. Are you afraid to speak? Or must you wait until the council has convened?

STOIC. Tell us about the king who is to take the place of Caesar.

(*The next lines come rapidly.*)

FANATIC. Great is Caesar! Great is Athena!

DIONYSIUS. Tell us about the resurrection.

BLIND MAN. Perform a miracle!

MELIORIST. Selfish fiend! (*He pushes the BLIND MAN aside.*)

DAMARIS. Beware!

EPICUREAN (*to PAUL*). I've heard that those who touch your garment are transformed to gods. (*Some laugh at this.*)

STOIC. Speak, fellow! Wisdom may bring happiness!

PAUL (*walking slowly to the altar for the accused and facing them; they are very quiet. His speech begins gently but grows to great intensity as he proceeds*). Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, "To the Unknown God." Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all the things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation . . . that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your poets have said, "We are also his offspring." Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent. Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead! (*There is a time of silence.*)

EPICUREAN. Pretty words, Jew.

STOIC (*affected*). We will hear more of this matter! (PAUL *walks slowly to the gate at left and exits.*)

DIONYSIUS. I will hear more of it, for I will follow him. Such words have not been heard on Mars Hill until this hour! "The

times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent!" Who will come with me?

DAMARIS. I!

DIONYSIUS. You, Damaris. You and I — followers of the risen king!

FANATIC (*wildly*). Go then! And crosses wait for you! I see pain and death! Is your life so cheap that you will sell it for a pretty speech?

DIONYSIUS. Who else will go? No one? None of you? Will you all stay steeped in your illusions?

DAMARIS (*at right*). Come, Dionysius, he is going in the direction of the synagogue — alone.

BLIND MAN. Wait! I sought for light! I wanted sight for my blinded eyes — but a greater light hath come. In my heart I have seen God! The true and living God has appeared to me!

DAMARIS. Come with us then!

BLIND MAN. Give me your hand! (DAMARIS *takes his hand.*)

DIONYSIUS. Think on this, Athenians! (*With DAMARIS and the BLIND MAN he exits.*)

MELIORIST. The blind and foolish have gone after dreams. As one of our philosophers has said, "Where ignorance leads the simple follow."

EPICUREAN. Vain is the discourse of him by whom no human suffering's healed. Are the blind not always blind? Does yonder beggar walk because of Paul? (*They look at the BEGGAR for a moment.*)

STOIC. No — he sits as before. But there is a strange light on his face.

MELIORIST. Well, he is richer than before. (*It grows darker.*)

FANATIC. I see Mars Hill in dust and Caesar in his tomb. Hanan and Agar are forgotten! There is a cross against the sun! Like Antioch — so Athens!

EPICUREAN. Come, friends, this place is fast becoming a

madhouse. (*He comes to the MELIORIST.*) There is a banquet at the proconsul's house tonight.

MELIORIST. I hope he has another cask of wine from Sicily.

STOIC. I pity Damaris. Aye, the world is cruel to these Christians.

EPICUREAN. Come along, I know there will be dancing. (*They begin to file off.*)

FANATIC (*coming to the BEGGAR*). Did you hear that? Wine and dancing! (*The BEGGAR nods.*) We'll stand at the door. (*He helps the BEGGAR to his feet.*) Once they threw me a bone. It still had thick meat on it. They may give us the plate that was intended for Dionysius. (*They start off together.*) Think of it, beggar, we may eat the food of an Areopagite! The gods are kind. . . .

(*The others go quietly from the scene. . . . It has grown quite dark.*)

C U R T A I N

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Largo" *Handel*

INVOCATION

O Master from the mountainside,
Make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
Among thy restless throngs abide,
O tread the city's streets again.

HYMN: "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life" *North*

LITANY

Leader: For all those who have loved us and helped us,
that they may be enriched by thy perpetual presence —

Congregation: We humbly beseech thee.

Leader: For our children, that they may learn to love the
things which are pure, that they may be saved from the
things which defile —

Congregation: We humbly beseech thee.

Leader: For the men and women of business and the home,
caught in the frenzied race for honor and achievement,
that they may appreciate the permanence of things spir-
itual and find that which truly satisfieth the needs of the
soul —

Congregation: We humbly beseech thee.

Leader: For the sick and those who have found their
strength inadequate for the needs of the day, that they
may have strength and patience —

Congregation: We humbly beseech thee, O Lord.

Leader: For the poor and outcast, for those who have
none they can trust, for the hopeless and disheartened,
for those who feel that they have failed, that to them
may come the assurance of thy help —

Congregation: Hear our prayer, O Lord.

Leader: For the harassed, perplexed and doubting souls who have lost their way in the maze of life, who need the guidance of an eternal light, who should hear the great voice which speaks above all voices —

Congregation: Hear our prayer, O Lord.

PRAYER

Our Father, we thank thee for the courage of men such as Paul, who have counted all else but loss that they might attain to the fellowship of thy presence. We ask that, as we re-view this day one of the great scenes of the life story of this apostle to the Gentiles, we may be able to surround ourselves with the atmosphere of ancient Athens. May we live the scene which is portrayed. May our conclusions from this mighty appeal be such that we shall lift our hearts and eyes to hear the voice that is above all voices, to see the light that is above all lights. Amen.

OFFERTORY SOLO: "Come Unto Me" *Coenen*

HYMN: "From Every Stormy Wind that Blows" *Stowell*

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

BENEDICTION

Now may the Lord of the apostle whose eyes were opened on the Damascus road be with you, to bless you and give you peace. Amen.

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Recessional" *Eppeisheimer*

RESURRECTION

CHARACTERS

THE WOMAN

THE NAMELESS ONE

GAZA

THE YOUNG MAN

THE FIGURE IN WHITE

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Scene: A room in the house of Joseph of Arimathea.

Time: The morning of the Resurrection.

It is before dawn and small flickering lamps are lighted. Chairs, a table and a couch of the period are placed in position. At the back and left windows look out into the night. At either side is a door.



RESURRECTION

The NAMELESS ONE enters and takes a position at left window. She is dressed in somber attire, her long pale hands are almost luminous against her dark dress. She wears a flowing black headpiece. The WOMAN enters and seats herself at the table. Her garment is gray with an occasional contrast of black and white, as is also her headpiece. She bows as in prayer. The NAMELESS ONE turns and looks at her. Then she speaks.

THE NAMELESS ONE (*at the window*). It is still very dark.

THE WOMAN (*her hands relaxing*). And very quiet. Even the guards at the tomb are quiet.

THE NAMELESS ONE. That is because the master of the house went out to silence them.

THE WOMAN. He is a good man. (*Silence.*)

THE NAMELESS ONE (*after a moment.*) Yes, Joseph of Arimathea is a very good man. Earlier in the night I saw a lamp in this window. I came here — rather, I was drawn here.

THE WOMAN. Did you feel that, too, tonight?

THE NAMELESS ONE. What?

THE WOMAN. A power . . . guiding you — aimlessly sometimes — through the dark?

THE NAMELESS ONE. Yes. (*There is a time of silence.*)

THE WOMAN. Who are you?

THE NAMELESS ONE. A nameless one who came to pray in Joseph's garden where they laid the Christ. . . . You are trembling. Are you cold? (*The WOMAN shakes her head. The NAMELESS ONE removes her shawl and places it around the Woman's shoulders.*)

THE WOMAN. You are very kind. You were kind to me in the garden — when I was frightened.

THE NAMELESS ONE. I, too, was frightened earlier in the evening. I stumbled against you while you prayed. You gave a little cry and ran away. I thought I would never see you again. But it is a strange night. A night when even the dead seem to walk.

THE WOMAN. Why do you call yourself a nameless one?

THE NAMELESS ONE. To lose myself in a world that will despise my name. A few days ago I put it from me like a curse, covered my face, and played the leper —

THE WOMAN. I thought that only one could feel such agony.

THE NAMELESS ONE. You mean — he who lies buried in the sepulcher?

THE WOMAN. I mean — myself. I thought tonight — before I touched your hand — that it was but the shadow of myself that walked and prayed in Joseph's garden. Somewhere, I felt, my real self lay in dreams from which some day I'd waken with a cry. And in that waking find myself beside a manger bed once more —

THE NAMELESS ONE (*in a low, awed voice*). A manger bed? (*The WOMAN turns away. The NAMELESS ONE speaks excitedly*) Tell me the rest. Who are you?

THE WOMAN. A woman.

THE NAMELESS ONE (*quickly*). A mother? (*The WOMAN is silent.*) I had hoped you were a mother. I thought perhaps you were a peasant — perhaps a mother like myself, who once had borne a son in some such lowly place. A son for whom you wished to pray here near the tomb of one who set such worth on motherhood — who taught us God was good and ready to forgive.

THE WOMAN. You had a son?

THE NAMELESS ONE. Yes.

THE WOMAN. And would you, if you could, have him a babe again upon your breast? (*The NAMELESS ONE is silent.*) My tongue is wild tonight. I thought that every mother in the world were wishing that with me.

THE NAMELESS ONE. I wish it.

THE WOMAN. And I! (*Then, quietly*) Or is it only my despair that speaks? I hope that I will not forget the years of love, when, from the silent corner of my motherhood, I watched him grow in stature and in mind. Forget that first cold cradle which my love transformed into the birthplace of a king. . . . (*Far in the distance, just audible, a choir is singing "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The song serves as a background for the following lines*) Forgive me — but I remember how men brought gifts unto my firstborn child. A star, bright as a fire, stood against the sky. A voice spake "Peace," and in the straw, quivering beneath his restless cry, I saw the face of God. What peace was this! I sometimes think it mocked me all life long! (*She turns to the NAMELESS ONE.*) Tell me, did your son grow away from you so fast? Did you have him only such a little while as I? Or lives he still? Living or dead, be glad that he met no such agony as mine! (*The WOMAN has risen.*)

THE NAMELESS ONE (*in quiet terror*). Who are you? What is this talk of stars against the sky?

THE WOMAN. Forgive me. There — is that a light upon the path?

THE NAMELESS ONE. Who was your son? Who are you? Tell me! (*The song stops abruptly.*)

THE WOMAN (*quietly, after a moment*). A mother like yourself — to comfort and be comforted, torn between despair and hope. Why do you stare at me?

(*There is the sound of someone at the door. GAZA, a servant, enters. His gray garment is girdled by a wide red tunic-cord. His headgear consists of a piece of red and yellow striped material, falling to his shoulders.*)

GAZA (*to someone outside*). You may come in. My master will soon be here.

(*The YOUNG MAN comes in. He is richly dressed. Over his soft blue undergarment is thrown a cloak lined with red, fastened at the throat with a jeweled brooch. His headpiece is soft blue*

banded with pure white. He wears many rings. There is an air of wealth about him.)

GAZA. These two women are waiting here until dawn. The house of Joseph of Arimathea is fast becoming an inn.

YOUNG MAN. I doubt not that all are welcome.

GAZA. Indeed, my master is a generous man. Too generous oftentimes for his own good.

YOUNG MAN. So you think I may see the tomb at break of day?

GAZA. Why not? The guards will curse a bit, but that is because they are Romans. They cursed, too, when Nicodemus, that is my master's friend, brought myrrh and spices to the tomb. "Are you one of his disciples?" they said to him. And Nicodemus replied, "I am." Yes, that took courage.

YOUNG MAN. Nicodemus admitted his discipleship?

GAZA. That he did. But so did my master.

YOUNG MAN. Joseph of Arimathea — a disciple? I thought he was a member of the Sanhedrin?

GAZA. Well, so he was. But I was with him when he went to beg the body of the crucified. He went to Pilate, you know, on the evening of that horrible day. "I pray thee," he said, "let me take the body from the cross and bury it." Pilate looked at him and said, "Are you of his family?" My master shook his head. "I am Joseph of Arimathea," he replied, "a Jew and a disciple of the Christ."

THE WOMAN (*speaking out of the shadows*). And then, what happened? (*They look at her.*)

GAZA. Well, he confessed that he was a follower. . . . Some say that Pilate wept. But I did not see that. I do know that my master offered him money and he refused it. "I have washed my hands of the matter," Pilate explained. Then we went to Calvary. Nicodemus and another man accompanied us. It is some distance from the governor's house. It was fast grow-

ing dark and we hastened since our custom forbids a body remaining on the cross after nightfall.

THE WOMAN. Was no one at the cross besides the watchman?

GAZA. No one. All had forsaken him. Mother and friends were gone. Well, the storm had driven them away. There was a storm, you know, about the third hour. (*The WOMAN, weeping, has turned away.*) Well, I must be about my duties. Rest you until the master comes. (*As he is about to go out an angel, the FIGURE IN WHITE, enters. It has the appearance of a young man. Invisible to the persons in the room, it goes directly to the side of the WOMAN.*) That's strange.

YOUNG MAN. What?

GAZA. Did you see someone enter just now?

YOUNG MAN. What do you mean?

GAZA (*raising his lamp to look about the room*). I thought — Well, no matter. (*He goes out. The YOUNG MAN seats himself, takes a moneybag from his girdle, and begins quietly counting some coins.*)

FIGURE IN WHITE (*quietly, to the WOMAN*).

Weep —

A part of life is meant for tears.

THE NAMELESS ONE (*at the window*). A wind is rising.

YOUNG MAN. It will soon be dawn. (*He continues his counting.*)

FIGURE IN WHITE (*to the WOMAN, as before*).

So was

A part of life once meant for joy —

Triumph and joy.

(*Far in the distance, just audible, a choir is singing, " Ride on, Ride on in Majesty." It serves as a background for the following lines*)

That day,

Of him the prophet sang:

Who is this that cometh
Out of Edom,
With dyed garments
Out of Bozrah?
This that is glorious in his apparel,
And marching in the greatness
Of his strength?

O'er all the way
Green palms were strewn,
And flowers fell before his feet.
Rejoice and sing, Jerusalem,
They cried.
And many spread their garments
In the way,
And sang: Hosanna!
Blessed is he that cometh,
That cometh in the name of God.
Blessed is the kingdom,
The kingdom of our Lord,
The kingdom of our Father,
Even David!
Unto him hosanna,
Glory and hosanna
Unto him!

And you, that day,
Half-hidden in the throng,
Greeted a son,
While others hailed a king.

(The song has quietly died away and it is very still save for the clink of the Young Man's coins. He soon returns the bag to his girdle.)

THE WOMAN. Yes, he was mine! Do you hear?

YOUNG MAN. What are you saying, woman?

THE WOMAN. They called him king and lord. I called him —

YOUNG MAN (*intently*). What?

THE NAMELESS ONE (*fearfully*). Don't you know who she is?

YOUNG MAN. If you are his mother, listen to me. One day I met him in Judea beyond Jordan and I said to him, "Good teacher, what shall I do that I may have eternal life?" He looked at me and said, "Why callest thou me good? One only is good and that is God. But if thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments." I said to him, "Which commandments, good teacher?" And he recited unto me the commands of our lawgiver Moses.

THE WOMAN. And then — ?

YOUNG MAN. "All these," I answered, "I have kept from my youth. What lack I yet?" He smiled and quietly replied, "If thou wouldst be perfect indeed, go, sell that which thou hast and give it to the poor. When thou hast done that, then come and follow me." I turned away and never saw him again.

THE NAMELESS ONE. Who was with him that day?

YOUNG MAN. His disciples.

THE WOMAN. Then — you did not follow him?

YOUNG MAN. The day they crucified him — that day I sold all my possessions and complied with his command. Could I do less since he laid down his life for his belief? Mine is the sin that I delayed so long.

THE NAMELESS ONE. Was Judas Iscariot there that day — with him — in Judea?

THE WOMAN. Who speaks of Judas Iscariot? (*The FIGURE IN WHITE raises his hands as though to silence her.*)

THE NAMELESS ONE. Forgive me.

THE WOMAN. Forgive thou me.

YOUNG MAN. Yes, he was there. I still remember him because he held the moneybag. He looked unlike the deed of which

he is accused. Scarcely more than a boy beside the bearded Peter.

THE NAMELESS ONE. Yes. . . .

YOUNG MAN. This sack of gold — the last I still possess — I had intended to place within the hands of Judas that he might distribute it among the poor. I cannot help but say I would have trusted him even as the Master trusted him.

THE NAMELESS ONE. Those who knew Judas as a child —

THE WOMAN. Why will you speak of Judas Iscariot?

THE NAMELESS ONE. This is a night in which to speak. . . .

YOUNG MAN. And then I heard the whisper being passed throughout Judea, "Judas has betrayed the Christ!"

THE NAMELESS ONE. So quickly accursed was he, he took his life. (*Then to the woman*) But you — speak not too harshly of his name.

THE WOMAN. Who are you?

THE NAMELESS ONE. I cannot speak of manger beds or stars against the sky, or men with gifts. I only know he, too, was once a babe.

YOUNG MAN. Some say that Judas thought the Christ would call down angels from the skies and save himself. Instead he never lifted a hand except to forgive. . . .

THE WOMAN. For that they nailed him to the cross — Jesus —

THE NAMELESS ONE. For that he hanged himself — Judas —

YOUNG MAN. Do you know that I heard in the city that he might still save himself? Rise from the dead? Some say he once predicted it. If he could arise — come here into this room — through these doors — stand before us as he was — or with the print of the nails upon his hands and feet — I'd be the first to fall upon my knees before him — with these few coins and this indulgent body begin my discipleship — take Judas' place among the twelve, if he allowed! (*It has grown a bit lighter in the room.*)

THE NAMELESS ONE (*at the window*). The stars have left the sky. . . . Far in the distance I see a lantern. . . . The wind is still. . . . (*The YOUNG MAN has seated himself thoughtfully.*)

FIGURE IN WHITE (*to the WOMAN*).

Give her your hand.

(*The WOMAN is motionless. The FIGURE IN WHITE puts his hand in hers and leads her to the NAMELESS ONE.*)

THE WOMAN. Here. (*She extends her hand.*)

THE NAMELESS ONE. You offer your hand to — me?

THE WOMAN. Yes.

THE NAMELESS ONE. You — know who I am?

THE WOMAN. I know.

FIGURE IN WHITE (*to the WOMAN*).

Say unto her,

“No sin is too great for his compassion.”

THE WOMAN (*to the NAMELESS ONE*). No sin is too great for his compassion.

THE NAMELESS ONE (*trembling*). God bless you evermore and grant you peace! (*She weeps. The WOMAN puts an arm about her and helps her to a chair.*)

FIGURE IN WHITE.

If all of you had hearts

Tuned to the Infinite,

And ears

To hear me speak —

How easily might

Joy acclaim

This saddened hour!

Think not of death

When death has been o’ercome.

I soon must go

To set
The resurrection hand of Time.

O, what a morn is this!
Why weep?
The angel host
Which Judas hoped
The Saviour would call down,
Are called.
Round yonder sepulcher
They wait this glorious morn.

Fear not,
Be not afraid.
And you, who call yourself
A nameless one,
Remember, God is Love.

(*Enter JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA.*)

JOSEPH. Good peace, my friends. I am Joseph of Arimathea.

YOUNG MAN. Your servant was kind enough to bid me enter. I wait the dawn to make my pilgrimage unto the sepulcher.

JOSEPH. Are you a follower of the Christ?

YOUNG MAN. That am I, by God's grace.

JOSEPH. As I myself, no doubt. Until the moment he was crucified I doubted him. Then, with his death — that day in which my kinsmen nailed him to the tree — I understood. I long had thought Messiah would come as a sovereign, with an army, and ambition for an earthly kingdom. He came a lowly man who spoke of life and love. Could I do less than give him a resting place, even a sepulcher?

THE WOMAN. He had no earthly thing to call his own.

JOSEPH. That is true, woman. I heard him say that he had not where to lay his head. . . . But you must all be very hungry

and tired. When Gaza comes he will bring refreshments for us all. We will lay palms on the stone which guards the entrance to his grave.

YOUNG MAN. Until then — ?

JOSEPH. Until then let us be patient and pray. One of his disciples, a man who is no longer counted among the twelve, but one once trusted, met me a fortnight ago and taught me his Master's prayer. It has often encouraged me during these last dark days.

THE NAMELESS ONE. Judas taught you a prayer?

JOSEPH. As Jesus taught it to him, yes.

YOUNG MAN. And as you will teach it to us?

JOSEPH. Come, then. (*He kneels and begins to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven. . . ." One after another they kneel during the prayer. Very softly, far in the distance, a choir begins to sing a triumphant resurrection hymn. The song continues after the prayer is ended.*) That was the prayer. (*The NAMELESS ONE has gone to the window.*)

YOUNG MAN. May we now go to the sepulcher?

THE NAMELESS ONE (*excitedly*). Master!

JOSEPH. What is it?

THE NAMELESS ONE. Someone is swinging a lantern and running wildly up the path!

THE WOMAN. Listen! (*The music has grown in volume until it floods the stage. GAZA enters.*)

GAZA. He is risen!

(*During a crescendo in the resurrection hymn the curtain falls.*)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Easter Morning on Mount Rubidoux"
Gaul

OPENING SENTENCES

He died, and with him perished all that men hold dear;
 Hope lay beside him in the sepulcher,
 Love grew corpse-cold, and all things beautiful beside
 Died when he died.

He rose; with him rose hope and life and light;
 Men said, "Not Christ but death died yesternight."
 And joy and truth and all things virtuous,
 Rose when he rose.

— *Author unknown*

GLORIA PATRI

LITANY

Leader: Triumphant Lord, whom enmity and spite could not embitter, pride and force could not break and even death and the grave could not contain: Thou art worthy to receive glory, honor, reverence and praise, for with thy resurrection came the assurance of the everlasting hope that rises within the human heart. Thou who didst turn the night of mourning into the morning of praise, accept our prayer of adoration and our litany of praise, and demonstrate thy favor by renewing in us thy spirit.

For the boundless love which honored mankind by taking upon itself our human form, and subjecting itself to all our ills and limitations —

Congregation: We thank and we adore thee, Lord.

Leader: For the rugged humanness of him who took the

children in his arms and blessed them, who supped with his treasured companions, and sought the solace of hill-side, lakeshore and synagogue —

Congregation: We thank and we adore thee, Lord.

Leader: For the gallant courage of him who lived our human life in all its fullness, maintaining its dignity and never becoming common by contact with common things —

Congregation: We thank and we adore thee, Lord.

Leader: For the gracious pity of him who wept with those who mourned, who flung himself between men and their accusers, and won for himself the splendid reproach of being the friend of publicans and sinners —

Congregation: We thank and we adore thee, Lord.

Leader: For the tenacious faith of him who faced the cross without murmur or complaint and died with a prayer of pardon on his lips —

Congregation: We thank and we adore thee, Lord.

Leader: For the glorious triumph of love which conquered death, shattered the grave, rose in power on the third day, and guaranteed eternal life —

Congregation: We thank and we adore thee, Lord.

In unison: Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ, thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Because he lives, we shall live also.

CHORAL RESPONSE: "Glory Be to Thee, O Lord" *Gounod*

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matt. 28:1-10

PRAYER

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who didst bring from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep: Aid us now, we beseech thee, by thy Holy Spirit, that we may worthily celebrate his glorious resurrection. Deliver us from all worldly thoughts and cares, so that we may truly and gladly worship thee, and, when

we leave thy house, be enlightened, comforted and fortified, to live a life of joyful trust, to love thee more fervently, and more faithfully serve thee. And this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all might, majesty, dominion, and power, world without end. Amen.

— *Hubert L. Simpson*

OFFERTORY SOLO: "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth"
Handel

HYMN: "Crown Him with Many Crowns"

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Largo" *Handel*

BENEDICTION, *to be pronounced during the organ postlude:*

May the love of the great God of us all, which brought our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, live in you and establish through you the work of his kingdom. Amen.

THE WINDOW

CHARACTERS

SAMUEL CARDINGTON

JEAN, *his daughter, eighteen*

DICK, *his son, sixteen*

THE GHOST OF WAR

A VOICE

Scene: A room in the summer home of Samuel Cardington.

Time: The present.



THE WINDOW

It is early evening. SAMUEL CARDINGTON is seated in a comfortable chair, his feet on a footstool. He has been paging through a newspaper. JEAN, his daughter of eighteen, is seated at a piano playing a portion of the "Recessional."

CARDINGTON. I wish you'd stop that, Jean.

JEAN (*turning to him, somewhat surprised*). I didn't know it bothered you.

CARDINGTON. It doesn't bother me exactly, but it's so ridiculous to dig up every sentimental ditty just because it happens to be a holiday.

JEAN. Memorial day,* you know.

CARDINGTON. Humph! Memorial day. A day for pacifists and reformers, for men who have never encountered the cold facts of life — dreamers, poets, preachers! Yes, they can rant about peace on earth, good will to men. (*He folds the newspaper.*) Where's Dick?

JEAN. At the club. Can I do anything for you, father?

CARDINGTON. No, just let me sit here a while — you might tell Simmons to come in later.

JEAN (*coming to his chair*). I'm sorry about my playing.

CARDINGTON. Forget it. Listen, Jean, there's no use being sensitive about these things.

JEAN. What do you mean?

CARDINGTON. For over thirty years I've been in business manufacturing munitions. To kill? No, to protect. To promote war? No, to make war less possible. Nothing can establish peace as quickly as preparedness. Let each country be armed, fortified!

* Any significant day or occasion may be substituted.

JEAN (*interrupting with a gesture*). Let them stand protected within their own walls!

CARDINGTON. Exactly!

JEAN (*laughing*). You see, I've heard your theories so often I know them by heart.

CARDINGTON. The world will know them, too, before long. War is inevitable. There's no use salving that truth with silly hymns and waving flags. Peace will come and come to stay only when one country is wise enough to dictate world policies, and powerful enough to draw harmony out of the discordant powers of the nations. Memorial day! Bah! It's always a bad sign when intellect has to bow to emotion and flag-waving enthusiasm!

JEAN (*quietly*). I always get all mixed up when you start talking like that.

CARDINGTON. Well, they're facts, and it's facts we have to face! (*He gets up and walks away, goes toward the piano, where he looks quizzically at the music Jean has played.*)

JEAN (*remaining at the chair*). I don't know anything about preparedness or world policies, but I don't ever want to be where war is going on. I don't know anything about munitions and governments, but I never want to see anyone killed.

CARDINGTON. That's sentiment again — just what I've been talking about. Now, I say —

JEAN (*confronting him*). Don't you see, dad, whenever the word "war" is mentioned I think of Dick — always of Dick.

CARDINGTON. That's ridiculous.

JEAN. Maybe it is, but he flashes into my mind immediately. I can't think of him doing that — coming back wounded, crippled, perhaps —

CARDINGTON. Nonsense! If war should come tomorrow — tonight — you'd both stay right here. Dick would work with me in the office or at the shops. Men who protect the government in time of peace will find the government protecting them in time of war.

JEAN. There's something awful about it. . . .

CARDINGTON (*musings*). Cardington Arms! If I could set my guns in every port, on every ship, in every strategic point — if I could get a monopoly, so to speak, on the world's war materials — I could insure peace indefinitely — indefinitely. . . .

VOICE (*coming from outside*). Peace is not the offspring of power, but of love. . . .

CARDINGTON (*simultaneously*). What's that? (JEAN goes to an open window at the other side of the room and looks out.) What is it?

JEAN. A man is speaking in the park.

CARDINGTON. There's an ordinance against that.

JEAN. Not many are listening to him.

CARDINGTON. Close the window.

VOICE. Every war has made nations more conscious of the futility of war. Every war has made nations more determined for peace! Yet it is an appalling sacrifice when we think of it! Millions slaughtered before nations realize the folly of it all! Suffering, destruction, and death before countries are made to understand. From the blood-soaked battlefields, from the hospitals where soldiers groan and die, from the hearts of mothers and loved ones, from the staggering toll of recent wars, thank God, the thought of peace is taking hold of men. The Great Emancipator once said, "It is for us, the living, to resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain." Thus, today, it is for us, the living, to see that the principles of democracy and peace for which our loved ones gave their lives should not perish, but we

JEAN. He is a young man,
dressed in —

CARDINGTON (*sharply*).
Close the window, Jean!

JEAN. Yes, father. (*She
closes the window; the VOICE is
no longer heard.*)

CARDINGTON. A man can't have peace in his own home these days. Plain idiocy, I call it, out-and-out idiocy. Humph! Well, are you going to keep your nose pressed against the window all evening? What are you doing, Jean?

JEAN. Thinking.

CARDINGTON. Thinking! Humph! (*He has returned to his chair, seats himself and tries to interest himself in his paper. The lights gradually fade out, then come back on with duller glow. CARDINGTON is asleep in the chair. In the shadows JEAN is dimly outlined near the window. The GHOST OF WAR, attired in helmet and cape, booted and armed, comes in, approaches the chair, shakes Cardington's shoulders.*)

GHOST OF WAR. Mr. Cardington? Mr. Cardington?

CARDINGTON (*coming out of his sleep*). Well, what is it?

GHOST OF WAR. I want to speak with you.

CARDINGTON. Who are you? How did you get into the house?

should build them into the framework of international understanding, write them deep into the heart of human-kind. What does man require to impress him with the folly and everlasting misery of warfare? Who can hold before his incredulous eyes the pain and awfulness of war — make him remember brother killing brother — show him man like himself steeped in the blood of his fellows — lead him through fields forested with crosses — through cities charred and sullen with death —

GHOST OF WAR (*always in a low, foreboding voice*). Simmons let me in.

CARDINGTON. Who are you?

GHOST OF WAR. A visitor. Don't you know me? Don't you remember the October afternoon up in your office when I gave you the order for —

CARDINGTON (*disturbed*). Sh — Yes, I remember. I became a rich man that day. Why are you here now?

GHOST OF WAR (*stealthily*). I need you, Cardington. I have been silent too long. I am growing poorer and older each day — just as you are growing poorer and older. How would you like to work for me again?

CARDINGTON. Well, I — that is — What do you mean?

GHOST OF WAR. I mean my business, Cardington — WAR!

CARDINGTON. War? (*He comes to his feet.*) You mean munitions? You want munitions?

GHOST OF WAR. I want munitions. Your factories have been idle for a long time — your shops are deserted — you are going down, down — down where, Cardington? Do we work together?

CARDINGTON (*rationalizing*). I have a theory whereby peace for all the world could be assured with my munitions!

GHOST OF WAR (*highly amused*). Oh-ho! Ha-ha-ha! Peace with your munitions!

CARDINGTON (*stubbornly*). It is my theory. (*After a moment*) Well, what's your game? But speak softly, my daughter is. . . . (*He indicates.*)

GHOST OF WAR. Cardington, you turn out the goods — guns, tanks, gases. I'll do the rest!

CARDINGTON. You'll do the rest?

GHOST OF WAR. I told you I would come again — I told you I would not leave you for long. Are your shops in order?

CARDINGTON. They can operate at a moment's notice, but —

GHOST OF WAR. That is well, Cardington. The gods of war

love those who are prepared. Ha-ha-ha! You are a man of intellect, my friend; you understand that war is an indispensable factor in civilization.

CARDINGTON (*uneasily*). Yes, yes, I know —

GHOST OF WAR. We'll do this thing together, you and I, and when we're through. . . .

CARDINGTON. Yes — when we're through?

GHOST OF WAR. You'll be more powerful than ever. Isn't that enough? Power! You'll leave a name for men to conjure with, and as for wealth — there is no limit to what you can make by serving me. You know that, don't you, Cardington?

CARDINGTON (*moving away*). Speak softly.

GHOST OF WAR. You have not the stamina you had in other days, my friend. You grow cautious — you fear —

CARDINGTON (*turning to him*). What's your plan? I'll show you whether I fear or not!

GHOST OF WAR. Good, my friend! You see, I have great hopes for us; for though men speak of peace, they think of war. And when they think of war they think of me. And when they think of me they think of Cardington. Not a bad cycle, eh, old man?

CARDINGTON. Not bad, no.

GHOST OF WAR. Now, here's my plan —

(DICK CARDINGTON *comes in, a lad of sixteen. He leaves the door open behind him.*)

DICK. Good evening, dad.

GHOST OF WAR. Is this your son, Cardington?

CARDINGTON. Yes.

DICK. I'm Dick Cardington, sir.

GHOST OF WAR. I see. . . .

CARDINGTON. Why do you stare at him so?

GHOST OF WAR. I'm thinking how different he is than when I saw him last. He was just a boy then, playing in your shops.

CARDINGTON. Time flies.

DICK. I seem to remember you.

GHOST OF WAR. Men do not forget me easily. I am a sort of universal figure. You would be honored if you knew the notables who have saluted me and paid me their respects.

DICK. Why are you here tonight?

CARDINGTON. A friendly visit, Dick. Don't be alarmed.

GHOST OF WAR. Your father and I have matters of business to discuss.

DICK. Don't stare at me!

CARDINGTON. No, don't stare at the boy. Your eyes are —

DICK. — as if the dead of war lay in them — bleeding!

GHOST OF WAR. Ha-ha-ha! What else do you see in my eyes?

DICK. A million crippled men trying to find a place to die! A million mothers on their knees! A million wives watching at their windows — they try to smile, but it is too late! They think of praying but you stretch your gnarled old fingers across their lips. I see a —

CARDINGTON. Stop it! Stop staring at the boy!

DICK. I see a million cannon wheel to wheel — helmets rim to rim —

CARDINGTON. Stop it, I tell you!

GHOST OF WAR. Ha-ha-ha! Don't get excited, Cardington!

DICK. I see men raise their hands —

GHOST OF WAR (*in a gruesome voice*). I want you, Dick.

CARDINGTON. I'll put an end to this! Get out of this room — the boy is mad!

GHOST OF WAR (*advancing toward DICK*). I want you, Dick!

DICK. What are you trying to do to me?

GHOST OF WAR (*clamping his hands on Dick's arm*). I've got you, Dick!

CARDINGTON. Take your hands off that boy! Take your hands off him, I tell you!

DICK. Dad!

GHOST OF WAR. Your father is a friend of mine!

CARDINGTON. Listen to me, Ghost of War, listen to reason!

GHOST OF WAR. Reason? You know how I listen to reason, old man!

DICK. You're hurting my arm!

CARDINGTON. Simmons!

GHOST OF WAR. Why can't we do this quietly?

CARDINGTON. What do you want?

GHOST OF WAR (*coming to him*). Do Cardington's shops start turning out munitions tomorrow?

CARDINGTON. I told you they would.

DICK (*standing aside, afraid*). I didn't know there was any rumor of war.

GHOST OF WAR. There is always a rumor of war.

CARDINGTON. Why don't you go now?

GHOST OF WAR. I haven't finished with you yet. In fact, I've just begun!

VOICE. The war to end war must be fought by the soldiers of God.

GHOST OF WAR (*turning toward the door quickly*). What's that?

CARDINGTON. Some raving pacifist.

DICK. I heard him as I came by.

VOICE. Let us gird ourselves with the strength of brotherhood! (*The voice may continue ad lib.*)

CARDINGTON. Are you afraid?

GHOST OF WAR. Not of him, but of his words. I fear his words! Close the door!

VOICE. Who are we to say that we shall take life? Treat life lightly as though we had created it?

DICK. He is a young man —

GHOST OF WAR. Well, close the door! Go on!

DICK. All right, I will. (*He goes to door.*)

VOICE. Who shall we say is responsible for wars? We who

must fight them? We who must give our loved ones or lay down our own lives on its red altar? (DICK *closes the door. The voice is shut out.*)

GHOST OF WAR. That's better. Come here, Dick.

CARDINGTON. What do you want with him?

DICK. Yes, what do you want with me?

GHOST OF WAR. Cardington, you called me the Ghost of War. Well, the Ghost of War wants your son! Do you hear?

CARDINGTON. You won't lay hands on him!

GHOST OF WAR. You will not give him to me?

CARDINGTON. No! Never!

GHOST OF WAR. Then I shall take him by force. Can you understand that?

CARDINGTON. By force?

GHOST OF WAR. By force of arms! Cardington Arms! Ha-ha-ha! Come to me, Dick!

DICK. Dad, I —

GHOST OF WAR. You needn't fear me, Dick. I am your father's friend.

CARDINGTON. My friend? No longer!

GHOST OF WAR. Listen, Cardington, when we last worked together you helped me; now you stand in my way. You've had a sudden change of heart. Is it because —

DICK. I can't turn from him!

GHOST OF WAR. Is it because I want *your* son now? Is it because the Ghost of War wants something that belongs to you? Is that it?

CARDINGTON. I want nothing more to do with you! Now, go!

GHOST OF WAR. Do you see this gun?

CARDINGTON. Put it away!

GHOST OF WAR (*jeeringly*). It is one of your guns, my friend. See here, on the cartridge case it says: Cardington Arms!

DICK. He's pointing it at me! Can't you do something?

CARDINGTON. Drop that gun!

GHOST OF WAR. Cardington, I, the Ghost of War, want your boy!

CARDINGTON. No — no!

DICK. Dad! (*A shot is fired. DICK screams and falls.*)

CARDINGTON. Dick! Dick!

GHOST OF WAR. Ha-ha-ha! Cardington Arms!

CARDINGTON. Oh — God! (*Comes to Dick's side.*)

GHOST OF WAR. Where is Jean?

CARDINGTON (*wheeling about, facing him*). What?

GHOST OF WAR. Oh, yes, there at the window — listening to the man in the park, eh? (*He starts toward her.*)

CARDINGTON. You'll never touch her — never!

GHOST OF WAR. I will unless she opens the window. Nothing can stop me but that. Come to me, Jean. (*JEAN remains unmoved, remote from the action.*)

CARDINGTON. Jean!

GHOST OF WAR. I want you, Jean!

CARDINGTON. Open the window! Save yourself!

(*The GHOST OF WAR approaches her stealthily. He laughs. There is a quick black-out, the laughter is silenced. When the lights come back on they are of the same intensity as at the opening of the play. DICK and the GHOST OF WAR are offstage. JEAN is just approaching her father's chair where he is asleep. She wakes him gently.*)

JEAN. Father. . . .

CARDINGTON (*opening his eyes*). Jean! What is it? Where's Dick? Are you all right?

JEAN. Why, dad! (*She laughs quietly.*) You must have been dreaming.

CARDINGTON. Dreaming? Wasn't there a stranger — a visitor here just now?

JEAN. Of course not. I've been over at the window all the time. May I open it as you said?

CARDINGTON. Did I say that?

JEAN. Yes, that's what brought me to your chair.

CARDINGTON. Is that all I said?

JEAN. That's all I heard you say. Why?

CARDINGTON. Is the man in the park still speaking?

JEAN. I think so — yes.

CARDINGTON (*slowly*). Then, open the window, Jean. (*She goes to the window and opens it.*)

VOICE. We seek only the good of the world and the security of all nations, that nations shall become one in faith, and all men brothers; that the bonds of affection between the sons of men shall be strengthened; that men may come to an understanding of the glorious message of "Peace on earth."

(*The curtain has fallen during these final lines.*)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Death of Ase," from *Peer Gynt* Grieg

CALL TO WORSHIP

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

I will hear what the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace unto his people.

INVOCATION

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Saviour, the Prince of Peace: Take away from our hearts all hatred and prejudice and whatsoever may hinder us from godly union and concord; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN: "God of the Nations, Near and Far"

John Haynes Holmes

RESPONSIVE READING

Leader:

These things shall be; a loftier race
Than e'er the world hath known shall rise,
With flame of freedom in their souls,
And light of knowledge in their eyes.

Congregation: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of joy, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth.

Leader:

They shall be gentle, brave and strong,
To spill no drop of blood, but dare

All that may plant man's lordship firm,
On earth, and fire, and sea, and air.

Congregation: And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord; and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor decide after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

Leader:

Nation with nation, land with land,
Unarmed shall live as comrades free;
In every heart and brain shall throb
The pulse of one fraternity.

Congregation: And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

Leader:

New arts shall bloom of loftier mold,
And mightier music thrill the skies,
And every life shall be a song,
When all the earth is paradise.

Congregation: And he shall judge between the peoples, and shall decide concerning strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matt. 5: 1-16

OFFERTORY QUARTET: "World Peace" *Harriet Case*

PRAYER

God of all nations,
We pray for all peoples of the earth;

For those who are consumed in mutual hatred and bitterness,
 For those who make bloody war upon their neighbors,
 For those who tyrannously oppress,
 For those who groan under cruelty and subjection.
 We pray thee for all those who bear rule and responsibility,
 For child races and dying races,
 For outcast tribes, the backward and the downtrodden,
 For the ignorant, wretched, and the enslaved.
 We beseech thee, teach mankind to live together in peace,
 No man exploiting the weak, nor hating the strong,
 Each race working out its own destiny,
 Unfettered, self-respecting, fearless.
 Teach us to be worthy of freedom,
 Free from social wrong,
 Free from individual oppression and contempt,
 Pure of heart and hand, despising none, defrauding none,
 Giving to all men in all the dealings of life
 The honor we owe to those who are thy children,
 Whatever their color, their race, or their caste.

—*A Book of Prayers for Use in an Indian College*

HYMN: "God of Our Fathers, Known of Old" *Kipling*

Tune, "Recessional" *Gower*

(*The music continues as the play opens.*)

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

POSTLUDE: "Recessional" *Gower*

BENEDICTION, *to be pronounced during the postlude:*

Peace be with you — the peace of God that passeth all understanding; peace be yours — the peace of Christ which no man can take from you. Peace go with you — the peace of love and good will to all mankind. Amen.

THE COMING OF LIGHT

CHARACTERS

MILES COVERDALE, *a translator*

JAMES NICHOLSON, *a printer*

ANTONIA, *his stepmother*

VESIAN, *a woman spy*

CORYDON, *a soldier under King Henry VIII*

Scene: London.

Time: October 5, 1535.

The curtain rises on a room dimly lighted by a single candle burning on a small table near a couch at back. What we see of the surroundings indicates little prosperity and the simple furnishings serve to make the place barely comfortable. Over the couch, however, a somewhat luminous icon is affixed to the wall, and if the light permitted we might distinguish the portrait of a Madonna and Child.



THE COMING OF LIGHT

After a moment of silence the door at right back opens and admits two men. The first to enter is JAMES NICHOLSON, thirty. The other is MILES COVERDALE, in his early fifties. Both men wear suits of the period. White collars, almost shoulder-wide, extend over their mantles. On their heads are tight-fitting skull-caps.

JAMES (*in a whisper*). Antonia. Antonia. (*Turning to COVERDALE*) Lay off your things.

ANTONIA (*from the couch*). James?

JAMES (*crossing to the couch, speaking in a low voice*). Yes, Antonia. Are you all right?

ANTONIA. You must not worry about me. (*She sits up — an old woman and blind, with a kind, patient face.*)

JAMES (*giving her her cane*). I have brought him here.

ANTONIA. Who?

JAMES. Coverdale. Miles Coverdale, Antonia. You remember —

ANTONIA. Oh, yes. (*Then, to herself*) Miles Coverdale. . . . (*JAMES motions to COVERDALE, who lays a large manuscript on the table and comes over.*)

COVERDALE. Please don't get up. (*He gives her his hand.*) James has told me about you, Antonia.

ANTONIA (*remaining seated, clasping his hand*). Miles Coverdale! (*With a smile*) If I could see — what would he be like?

JAMES. Oh, he is tall and —

COVERDALE (*interrupting, genially*). A homely old fellow, Antonia, with a pinched face and a nose as flat as if he had

slept on it half his life. His chin is covered with a growth of beard as thick as London's fog tonight. And if he'd take off his cap, which he never does, you would find a bald spot as big as your hand.

ANTONIA. But there's a heart — of which you said nothing. (*To herself*) And the heart is everything.

JAMES. And that hand you hold, Antonia, that's the hand that finished the first English Bible. And it is here — in this room. (*He goes to the manuscript, looks at it and lays off his mantle.*)

ANTONIA. I know. (*Then, as she releases Coverdale's hand*) You were careful?

JAMES. Yes. And we'll be going into the bindery as soon as we have a bite of food. We have come a long way and with not a little difficulty.

ANTONIA. I'll get it for you. (*She starts to get up.*)

JAMES. No, Antonia. (*Coming to her with the manuscript*) Here — this is it — (*he puts it into her hands*) — Coverdale's Bible. It was printed in Antwerp and we are going to bind it here tonight.

ANTONIA (*absorbed*). The Bible in English. . . .

COVERDALE. Yes, Antonia. The whole of the Scriptures — in English for the first time.

JAMES. Just as it says here, "Translated out of German and Latin into English." You know, Coverdale, I'd have changed that a bit.

COVERDALE. Yes?

JAMES. I'd simply have said, "Faithfully translated into English." I think it would go better here in London if we wouldn't give Germany any credit for it.

ANTONIA (*gently*). James —

JAMES (*laughing*). Forgive me, Antonia. (*He goes toward back and during the next speeches engages in setting the table with a few dishes and simple viands.*)

COVERDALE. I rather think England won't care much about the inscription.

ANTONIA. England will care only for light. But at what cost has this light come? (*To herself*) What cost. . . . (*Then*) What Wycliffe suffered we know. How John Huss died we know. And how Tyndale will die we have yet to see.

JAMES. Probably Tyndale will be released. When the book gets abroad —

ANTONIA. You say "when," and you do well, James. When tyrants rule, the just die in their faith. (*To COVERDALE*) You worked with Tyndale, didn't you?

COVERDALE. Yes, I was near him when they tricked him to his arrest. Did you ever hear the account of that?

JAMES. Parts of it. (*He lights two more candles.*)

COVERDALE. An agent whom Tyndale had often befriended invited him to dinner. As they passed a certain side-street the agent pointed his finger at Tyndale and indicated to some officers who were approaching that this was their man. And so they seized him. So they seized Jesus once, and so they seized Huss of whom you spoke. So they may seize us, Nicholson. . . .

ANTONIA. God will shield you.

COVERDALE. So we pray, Antonia. But whatever befalls it will be enough if only his Word is preserved.

JAMES (*with inward fear*). There is danger, of course. But it was Cromwell himself who came to you with the commission to continue the translation.

COVERDALE. Sometimes the bishops are stronger than royalty.

ANTONIA. Beware of the emperor. (*Then, to herself*) Beware of the emperor.

COVERDALE. What if it is God's will that his book go forward with the blood of martyrs? Have you not heard it said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"?

ANTONIA. Words of Jesus?

COVERDALE (*gently*). You will hear them soon, Antonia, in your own language. Hear of the day the Master was followed by a great multitude — and to speak to them he went into a mount. Let me find it for you. . . . (*He pages through the manuscript.*)

JAMES. And what was that you told me about him restoring sight to the blind — and I said Antonia should hear that?

ANTONIA. Yes, that. . . .

COVERDALE. Ah, there is so much. . . . It is like being dazzled by a sudden light — like finding oneself in a treasury after having looked for coins in the street. . . . Here, Antonia —

ANTONIA (*leaning forward upon her cane*). Yes?

COVERDALE (*reading*). “And he cometh nigh unto Bethsaida; and they bring unto him one who is blind and beseech him to touch him. Jesus takes him by the hand and leads him away. Once out of the city Jesus spat upon the eyes and putting his hands upon the man asks if he can see anything. And the man says, I see men like trees walking and light has come unto me. And Jesus says, See that thou tell no man what has happened unto thee.”

ANTONIA. Blessed Master! And now unto us is that light come!

COVERDALE. Yes, Antonia. And it will be worth everything that has been endured before — and everything that must be endured hereafter.

ANTONIA (*to herself*). Men like trees walking. . . .

COVERDALE (*absorbed*). Today — October fifth, 1535. Five years ago all copies of the Pentateuch were burned. And two years earlier some fifteen thousand copies of the first English New Testament translation were destroyed. I stood with Tynedale that night and he turned to me and said, “I, too, am on the pyre.”

JAMES (*disturbed*). But there is no danger, Coverdale.

King Henry has his divorce now and upon petition for an English Bible he gave his consent. Doesn't that show he is in sympathy with the church?

ANTONIA. Have you never learned, James, that men fear light more than the dark?

COVERDALE (*to JAMES*). Are you afraid?

JAMES (*after a moment of silence*). I brought you here unafraid, didn't I? Tonight we bind God's Word and tomorrow — why tomorrow I wouldn't be afraid to show it to the king! I could attach an inscription saying, "To the Emperor and Prince King Henry the Eighth."

COVERDALE. No.

JAMES. Why not?

COVERDALE. Because I have seen men suffer and die for this book. I have heard their prayers and they asked only that it should go to England undefiled.

ANTONIA (*to herself*). Men like trees walking. . . .

COVERDALE. And also because God does not need the favor of kings and men.

ANTONIA. Now, one word more from the holy book and then a bite to eat. Have you light enough, James?

JAMES. Yes, Antonia.

COVERDALE (*opening the manuscript again*). Where shall one turn? One might as well do as it was said of Luther, "He let God open the book for him." And so he'd lay his German Bible before him and let it open where it would. So — here — you, Antonia, open it and wherever your fingers fall let that be the word for us tonight.

ANTONIA. God direct me then. For this may be his way of speaking to his children. (*She opens the manuscript and puts her fingers on a page.*)

COVERDALE (*reading*). "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the

law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in —" (*He is interrupted by a knock at the door.*)

JAMES (*whispering*). Who is that?

ANTONIA. Go into the bindery — quickly —

COVERDALE (*closing the book and guarding it*). This will not be destroyed now.

ANTONIA (*getting up*). Please — into the shop. (*The rap is repeated.*)

JAMES. Yes, come.

COVERDALE (*he hides the manuscript on the couch*). This is a better way.

ANTONIA. What have you done?

COVERDALE. I have hidden it.

ANTONIA. Sit down then — here at the table. (*She starts toward the door, feeling her way with her cane. The men sit down at their places.*)

COVERDALE (*bowing his head*). Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Let thy kingdom come. Thy will be fulfilled, as well in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever. Amen. (*Meanwhile ANTONIA has opened the door to VESIAN, a woman in her early thirties, commonly attired.*)

ANTONIA. Good evening.

VESIAN (*just before the prayer is ended*). Do men still pray that prayer in London?

JAMES (*when the prayer is ended*). Were you looking for someone?

VESIAN. I beg your pardon. I lost my way in the fog and —

ANTONIA. Who is it, James?

VESIAN (*drawing away*). Is she — blind?

JAMES. Yes. But who are you and —

VESIAN. Won't you believe me when I say I am lost? It is usually so, is it not? Men pray but when their spirits are tested they become as other men. I have been walking — half the night it seems — and I come here hungry.

COVERDALE. Here, Nicholson, let her take my place.

ANTONIA. There will be plenty for all. (*She locks the door.*)

JAMES. Of course. You have come into the home of James Nicholson, a printer. This is my stepmother, Antonia. And this is a friend.

COVERDALE. Miles Coverdale.

VESIAN (*JAMES has offered her his chair*). Thank you. But where is your place now?

JAMES. Be welcome to what we have.

VESIAN (*indicating ANTONIA*). And she?

JAMES. Antonia has eaten earlier tonight.

ANTONIA (*to herself as she goes to back*). Men like trees. . . .

VESIAN. What is that she says? (*For a few moments no one speaks. ANTONIA sets out another plate.*)

ANTONIA. You must eat, too, James. (*He seats himself and partakes of the food with the others.*)

COVERDALE. The fog is bad tonight, isn't it?

VESIAN. Have you been out in it?

COVERDALE. Oh, yes, earlier. (*Again there is silence.*)

VESIAN. Are you — Protestants?

COVERDALE. We are.

VESIAN. I thought you might be when I heard you pray. . . .

ANTONIA. Where were you going?

VESIAN. I — (*For a moment she is confused as the staring eyes of ANTONIA turn in her direction.*)

JAMES. It doesn't matter.

VESIAN. If I could trust you. But I can trust you after hearing you pray. . . . I was going to a friend's — to secure

some leaves of a German Testament. Why — why do you look at me so? Are you not in sympathy with the Bible?

COVERDALE. Do you read German?

VESIAN. A little. But since there is no other way to get the Scriptures — Of course you have heard of William Tyndale. How easily he might have given England an English Bible. But he was too credulous — and he failed.

COVERDALE. Why do you think he failed?

VESIAN. Didn't he? One night at Paul's Cross they burned thousands of his Testaments. Some say that there are only two left in all England. The cardinal sat on his throne and watched them lead heretics to their death. They, too, were burned on the autumn night — and many of them were compelled to light the pyres with their own hands. Has Tyndale failed?

COVERDALE (*studying her*). This German Bible you mentioned — how was that brought to England?

VESIAN. It was smuggled from Cologne. Of course you know that they have been smuggled into the country with flax since the embargo was lifted.

ANTONIA (*still staring in her direction*). And you love the Word of God so much that you will try and read it in a foreign tongue?

VESIAN. Someday, we hope, someone will again take up Tyndale's work.

COVERDALE. Tyndale is working now — in the Tower.

VESIAN. No translation will ever come from the Tower. Nothing comes from the Tower but suffering.

JAMES. But Tyndale's friends, what of them? Sir Monmouth —

VESIAN. Sir Monmouth will be taken, too. That is, I fear he will be taken. (*There is a moment of silence.*)

ANTONIA (*quietly, but in a sinister voice*). I wish I could see you — I wish I could see a woman who loves the Word of

God so much she'll brave the London fog for it. (VESIAN *stirs uneasily*.)

COVERDALE (*strangely*). Antonia. . . .

VESIAN. Of course, I don't want it only for myself. You see — (*She turns from ANTONIA, distracted.*) Why does she stare at me like that?

COVERDALE (*intensely*). How can she stare when she is blind?

JAMES. Antonia. . . . (ANTONIA *turns away*.)

VESIAN (*her self-possession returning*). No, I do not want it only for myself. Someone I know — dying — wanting a word of comfort. You are a printer. You should know where there might be a German Bible or a fragment of it.

JAMES. No, I do not.

COVERDALE. Perhaps I could help you, my friend. (*His eyes meet Vesian's. There is a moment of silence.*)

VESIAN (*uneasy under his gaze*). I know. We are all in this. We are all in danger, are we not? We know what they have done to those who have had traffic with the book — how they have cut off their hands and gouged out their eyes. And you — (*She looks squarely at COVERDALE.*)

COVERDALE (*quietly*). Yes — I?

VESIAN. I do not know your business, but you and I, even she — (*she indicates ANTONIA*) — we are all under suspicion if we profess to be interested in the Scriptures.

COVERDALE. Shouldn't that make us feel a kinship one with the other? Didn't the Master say, "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am he . . . and then are ye my disciples indeed"?

VESIAN. You know the Scriptures well. . . .

ANTONIA (*half to herself*). "And he shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water. . . ."

VESIAN (*getting up*). Well, I thank you for your kindness.

JAMES. But where are you going?

VESIAN (*becoming more crafty*). To continue my search and hoping that heaven will help me to success.

COVERDALE (*quietly*). How would you like God to speak to you in your own tongue — in English?

VESIAN. Oh, sir, will we ever see that day?

ANTONIA (*as before*). “Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. . . .”

VESIAN. Why does she keep saying those things?

JAMES. Antonia. . . .

COVERDALE (*quietly, to VESIAN*). You are afraid.

VESIAN. Do you know where there is a Bible?

COVERDALE (*after a moment*). Yes. (ANTONIA *gasps audibly. There is a moment of suspense.*)

VESIAN. You are very kind.

JAMES (*betraying a certain fear*). Coverdale, if we —

COVERDALE (*going to the couch*). Yes, I know where there is a Bible.

ANTONIA (*in a whisper*). Blessed Master —

VESIAN. Well —

COVERDALE (*returning with the manuscript*). You see before you, my friend, the Bible in your own tongue. English — for which the king has scattered blood. It is here, the words of the prophets, the apostles, and the Master.

VESIAN. The English Bible —

JAMES. The English Bible.

COVERDALE (*to VESIAN*). Now, read.

VESIAN (*nervously*). Why should I read?

ANTONIA (*almost sharply*). You have eyes to read.

COVERDALE. For this reason it has come to you, my friend!

VESIAN (*nervously, attempting to hide her eagerness*). Let me see the front of it.

ANTONIA. Beware!

JAMES. Antonia. . . .

COVERDALE (*showing VESIAN the title page*). There —

VESIAN (*reading*). “Translated out of German and Latin into English by Miles Coverdale.” (*She looks at him.*) I see! (*Then*) You men are very brave!

ANTONIA (*excitedly*). Judas has come!

VESIAN. Yes! (*Her whole attitude changes and she attempts to get possession of the manuscript. COVERDALE is too quick for her and keeps it firmly in hand.*)

JAMES. Spy!

ANTONIA. Spy! Spy!

COVERDALE (*to VESIAN*). What you would do, do quickly!

VESIAN (*bitterly, jeering*). Save yourselves! (*She rushes to the door, throws aside the bolt and is gone.*)

JAMES. Spy!

ANTONIA. You must go — both of you!

JAMES (*to COVERDALE*). Did you suspect?

COVERDALE. Yes.

ANTONIA. Quick — go quickly! God will protect you.

COVERDALE. God will protect us here as well.

JAMES (*who has gone for his mantle*). You are staying!

COVERDALE. We came here to bind the Word of God. Let us go on with it.

JAMES. Not I!

COVERDALE. We cannot turn back.

ANTONIA. For the sake of the Word — take it, and fly. In a moment they will be here.

COVERDALE. And why should we leave you, since we have all been spied upon? Isn't there danger for you as well?

JAMES. We must all go!

ANTONIA. No danger will come to me. . . . For me this little room has always been the world. Into it tonight has come a great light. I ask no more. (*She swoons slightly.*)

JAMES. Antonia!

ANTONIA. A great light!

COVERDALE (*he and JAMES proceed to take her to her couch*).
And you think we would leave you?

ANTONIA (*her voice weaker*). You must not think of me.

JAMES. Quietly now, Antonia, and lie still.

ANTONIA. If I could have seen her. . . .

COVERDALE. You did see her, Antonia, better than any of us.
But the Master came not to send peace but a sword, and tonight
that sword will strike our hearts.

ANTONIA. Let nothing stand between England and the Word
of God.

COVERDALE. No.

JAMES. Here, drink this, Antonia. Then let me get a doctor
for you.

ANTONIA. No. It will pass again. But if I were going —
to Him —

JAMES. Oh, Antonia —

ANTONIA (*in a weaker voice*). If this were the hour appointed
for me —

COVERDALE. Don't try to speak now.

ANTONIA. Bring me the light.

JAMES. What?

ANTONIA. His Word.

JAMES (*softly to COVERDALE*). I'll go for someone. Wait
here. And if anyone comes —

COVERDALE. Have no fear.

JAMES (*at the door*). And bolt this door. (*He goes.*)

ANTONIA. His Word. . . . For this, too, was his Word
given — that when men came to die — when darkness came —
they might have light. . . . James?

COVERDALE. James will be back, Antonia.

ANTONIA. James must not be afraid.

COVERDALE. No.

ANTONIA. But I was afraid. And I was afraid of this hour

— before his Word came to me. . . . Read. (*Very softly*)
“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water —”

COVERDALE (*reading*). “And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.” (*There is a knock at the door.*)
“Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment —”

CORYDON (*outside, simultaneously with Coverdale's next reading*). Is anyone there? Open, please. Open in the name of the king! I say, are you going to open —

(*A heavy hand is laid on the door and CORYDON, finding it unlocked, enters. He is straight, severe, attired as a soldier of the king. He stops instinctively as he sees the dim figures of COVERDALE and ANTONIA and hears the voice of COVERDALE complete the Bible reading.*)

COVERDALE. “— nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

ANTONIA. Blessed Master, keep and preserve thy Word and thy servant from harm! (*She repeats these words as a whispered prayer during the next few speeches.*)

CORYDON (*standing motionless*). Miles Coverdale! I arrest you in the name of his Majesty King Henry the Eighth!

COVERDALE (*quietly*). On what charges, my friend?

CORYDON. Heresy!

COVERDALE. How do they accuse me of heresy?

CORYDON (*not moving from his place*). Will you come?

COVERDALE. One word. I am under commission of his Excellency Sir Thomas Cromwell.

CORYDON (*interrupting sharply*). The king has obligations to others besides Thomas Cromwell. It is forbidden that any man should have or draw any text of Holy Scripture into English without license of the *bishop*. Will you bring your book and

come or shall I — (ANTONIA *gets up slowly*. CORYDON *looks at her*.)

ANTONIA. And what will be done to him?

CORYDON. We have a Tower in London. And we have fire.

COVERDALE (*close to ANTONIA*). Ask, rather, what will be done to the book.

ANTONIA. Nothing! I will keep it! I will keep it and no one shall take it from me. (*She has taken the book from COVERDALE and shields it with her remaining strength*.) Let them gouge out my dead eyes — let them take my life, for my life is already spent. But take this book from me and all England will rise against the king!

JAMES (*having entered*). Antonia! (*He comes to her side*.)

ANTONIA. All England will rise against the — king. (*Then, softly*) No — another must shield the book. You — James — and — (COVERDALE *takes the book from her failing hands and they lay her on the couch*.)

CORYDON (*sharply, but not moving*). Enough of this!

ANTONIA (*scarcely audible*). Our Father who art in heaven. . . . (*She continues the prayer through the next speeches. JAMES is at her side*.)

COVERDALE (*to CORYDON*). What will you do?

CORYDON (*advancing*). Remember Huss and Tyndale! (*A moment of silent suspense*.) You are not afraid?

COVERDALE. No, my friend. God has watched over me until this hour and I have no doubt he will guard me now.

CORYDON. A daring fellow, eh?

COVERDALE. No, a servant.

CORYDON. But not of the king.

COVERDALE. Of a King, yes!

CORYDON. And you, printer, if you value your tongue — come along!

COVERDALE. We value nothing henceforth save to do the will of God!

CORYDON. Once more — give me that book!

COVERDALE. Come, take it. (CORYDON *advances a few steps threateningly*.)

JAMES. Give it to him!

COVERDALE (*sharply*). Never!

CORYDON. With one thrust of this sword I can send both you and your blasphemous book into perdition.

COVERDALE. My Master vanquished perdition. Think you his Word can then perish therein?

JAMES. Let me speak! (*To COVERDALE*) Don't you know that what he says is true? So strong is Henry's arm that even the church has learned to bow to it. Now, why should we — we who are in possession of the most hated and most loved of treasures — why should we sacrifice ourselves and it upon these strange altars? Are we not men? Then let us reason together. Is there no alternative? (*To CORYDON*) What do you wish but to please your king?

CORYDON. What talk is this?

JAMES (*to COVERDALE*). And what do you wish but to please your heavenly King by making his Word known to our countrymen?

COVERDALE. I wish nothing save that. Neither life nor renown.

CORYDON (*to JAMES*). You are very shrewd.

JAMES (*to CORYDON*). If, then, to please your king you could bring him this book — not for him to destroy, but for him to disseminate among his subjects —

COVERDALE. What are you saying?

JAMES. Once I overheard that the king was willing to answer the request of the convocation. He is to have said, "If the Bible, as Tyndale predicted, is to be born in exile, I will nourish it on English soil." Do you not see? Here it is — complete — to receive his commendation!

CORYDON. I will be blunt. Let that honor be mine and I

will shield you both and see that the book reaches King Henry's hands.

COVERDALE. The Word of God needs no commendation from an earthly king!

CORYDON. Stubborn fellow! You forget there are guards and soldiers even now within call. Guards and soldiers who would rather have the request of the bishop fulfilled than the whims of the emperor.

JAMES. Coverdale, don't you see? Perhaps this, too, is the hand of God!

ANTONIA. Anything — that light may come!

JAMES. Yes, Antonia!

COVERDALE (*quietly*). Anything — that light may come?

CORYDON (*impatiently*). Well?

COVERDALE. And why do you think this book would so quickly find favor in the eyes of the king?

JAMES. Print on the book these words, "To the Most Noble and Gracious King Henry the Eighth this Book is dedicated by his humble subject, Miles Coverdale." (*To CORYDON*) Isn't that the way?

CORYDON (*significantly*). I know the emperor. . . .

JAMES. I will print it at once and bind it together.

ANTONIA. That light may come. . . .

COVERDALE. Yes, Antonia. (*He turns the manuscript over in his hands.*) Here is the light of the world — made brighter by the blood of those who loved it. Born in exile — yes, that is what Tyndale said. And I ask only that it bring the exiled back to God.

JAMES. Surely there is need for diplomacy here if we would gain our ends.

COVERDALE. I will make a confession unto you. I was loath to meddle with this work of translating because I realized my own insufficiency therein and recognized that I was lacking in

tongues. Notwithstanding, when I considered how great pity it was that we should want it so, and the desire of many others to translate it — others even less able than I — I made bold to undertake the work from necessity. But to say the truth before God, it was neither my labor nor desire to have this work put into my hands.

JAMES. God bless you, Coverdale!

CORYDON. We care not what power drove you to the writing of it. Come, then, inscribe it to the emperor! Where is your printery?

JAMES. This way. (*He indicates a door at left.*) But — (*indicating ANTONIA*).

COVERDALE. Go. I will stay with her.

CORYDON (*to COVERDALE*). Will you give it to me?

COVERDALE (*handing him the manuscript*). I do not give it to you. It is placed into your hands by the spirit of Wycliffe, and Huss, and Luther. Take it, and God grant you hold your word.

JAMES. This way, sir. (*He and CORYDON exit into the bindery.*)

COVERDALE (*quietly after they have gone*). Even here — diplomacy?

ANTONIA. What is it you say?

COVERDALE (*coming to her*). Antonia — that book — if it is not in the hearts of men it will avail nothing.

ANTONIA. But being there it will rob even death of its terror.

COVERDALE (*absorbed*). To the Most Noble and Gracious Prince King Henry the Eighth. . . . Antonia, sometimes I fear. . . . And someday England may ask how much of Tyndale's courage was mine.

ANTONIA. No, my friend, someday England will say that only in this manner could it have gotten its Bible freely into the hands of its subjects.

COVERDALE. Then you don't think his Word will suffer for what I have done tonight — dedicating this book to a tyrant king?

ANTONIA. God has strange ways and strange men to work his will. This night an English Bible finds its place in English hearts.

COVERDALE. I pray you may be right, Antonia. (*He kneels beside the couch.*)

ANTONIA (*placing a hand upon his head*). And may He bless his humble subject — Miles Coverdale.

CURTAIN

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Invocation" *James H. Rogers*

CALL TO WORSHIP

The sacred Book no longer suffers wrong,
Bound in the fetters of an unknown tongue,
But speaks with plainness art could never mend,
That simplest minds can soonest comprehend.

— *Cowper*

HYMN: "O Word of God Incarnate" *W. W. How*

RESPONSIVE READING

Leader: Thy word is a lamp unto my feet —

Congregation: And a light unto my path.

Leader: I have sworn and have confirmed it —

Congregation: That I will observe thy righteous ordinances.

Leader:

Lamp of our feet, whereby we trace
Our path when wont to stray;
Stream from the fount of heav'nly grace,
Brook by the traveler's way.

Congregation:

Word of the ever living God,
Will of his glorious Son;
Without thee how could earth be trod,
Or heaven itself be won?

Leader:

Lord, grant us all aright to learn
The wisdom it imparts;
And to its heavenly teaching turn
With simple childlike hearts.

SOLO, *to follow immediately the Responsive Reading:*

“ Break Thou the Bread of Life ” *Lathbury*

SCRIPTURE READING: Ps. 119:1–16

QUARTET: “ How Precious is the Book Divine ” *Fawcett*

OFFERTORY SOLO: “ O Saviour, Hear Me ” *Gluck*

OFFERTORY DEDICATION

Bless thou the gifts our hands have brought ;

Bless thou the work our hearts have planned ;

Ours is the wish, the will, the thought ;

The rest, O Lord, is in thy hand.

PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, we thank thee for the brave souls who dreamed of a humanity enlightened by thy word. Thou didst give them conviction of truth and courage to face the oppressor, determined, above all things, to bring the light of thy Word into the world. May we share in both their conviction and their courage. Help us to believe that the Bible has a living message for us this day, and give us courage to storm the bulwarks of the indifference which threatens its destruction. We believe, our Father, that this day needs the strength and vision which can come alone from the pages of the divine Book. Make us Bible believers, Bible interpreters and Bible lovers. Lead us through a study of its pages to a better understanding of thy kingdom and its expanding power upon this earth. We pray in the name of him who has been revealed in the pages of thy holy Book, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

HYMN: “ More Light Shall Break ” *Allen Eastman Cross*

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

BENEDICTION

Grant, O God, thy peace

To these who, through this hour,

Have worshiped thee.

Who in this quiet place have felt

Their souls' release, God's hush of peace.
God grant to these the power of Christ,
That lifts all life and calms all strife.
He is the Way, the Truth, the Light.
Abide with him
Forever. Amen.

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Allegro" from *Trio Sonata No. 5* Bach

THE WIDOW'S MITE

CHARACTERS

TALOMAI, *a widow of Jerusalem, about fifty*

URIEL, *her son, eighteen*

BENAR, *a friend of Uriel's*

Scene: Jerusalem.

Time: During Jesus' ministry.

A room in Widow Talomai's home — a low, sparsely furnished chamber, with somber walls showing stones in their natural state. There is an open doorway at left. This leads to the only other room in the house and subsequently out of doors. A little window at back looks out over a small open yard and the straggly street beyond, with its houses of the same natural stone.

In the room is a table upon which are a number of scrolls. The chairs match this table in rough, homemade appearance. On a piece of shelving, which seems to be a niche in the wall itself, are a number of vases and miscellaneous objects.



THE WIDOW'S MITE

The light is that of a dull mid-afternoon and the only illumination comes through the window. It is sufficiently light, however, for us to observe the Widow TALOMAI, a spirituelle woman of some fifty years, attired in a simple tunic of gray material. Her feet are in sandals. At the table is her son, URIEL, studiously bent over an open scroll. He is a rather attractive, dark, strong-appearing fellow of eighteen. He wears a white undertunic over which is thrown a darker capelike piece.

TALOMAI.

This is the day
On which the temple vaults
Await men's gifts
Unto the Lord.

URIEL.

Well, what is that to us?

TALOMAI (*quietly*).

Nothing, I fear. . . .

URIEL (*pointedly*).

Save that it is a dark reminder
Of the Lord's forgetfulness
Of such as we.

TALOMAI (*gently*).

Uriel. . . .

URIEL (*stubbornly*).

Well, 'tis true.
It is no pleasant thought
To be reminded we are
Beggar-poor.

Just yesterday
I heard a Pharisee
Refer to you as
Starving Widow Talomai.
That's pleasant for thy son to hear!

TALOMAI (*patiently*).

The Pharisees —
I pity them!
This day they stand
Within the market squares,
And call the populace
To watch them cast their gifts
Into the treasury.

URIEL.

I've seen them there —

TALOMAI.

Think you
That God delights
In such display?

URIEL (*bitterly*).

I know he prospers them.
I know they wear
Great jewels upon their hands,
And clothe themselves
In dazzling vestury.
I know they have
Enough to eat.
That's more than —

TALOMAI (*coming to him*).

Uriel —

Let us thank God
For what we have.

URIEL (*irked*).

What have we?

TALOMAI (*visualizing*).

Life and hope,
Jehovah's sky above our heads,
A bowl of bread,
And hands to clasp!
We have the firm, warm earth
Beneath our feet. . . .

URIEL (*with a shrug*).

And there you stop.

TALOMAI.

Nay, much more have we,
My son.

URIEL.

All this
The others, too, may boast —
The others who today may fling
Their gold into the treasury.
All this have they!
If this be justice —

TALOMAI.

God is judge!

URIEL (*rising, distracted*).

The bit I make
Is made as sweating slave
For these ungodly but
All-blessed rich.

TALOMAI.

Whether ungodly
Or all-blessed, Uriel,
Jehovah will decide,
Not we.

URIEL.

It is no pleasant thought
To feel condemned

To slavery and oppression!
And why?
Because my father
Sought a goodly walk
And died well-nigh a mendicant!
Because my mother is content
With what she hath.

TALOMAI.

Content?
Nay, not content.

URIEL (*continuing*).

Because the men of wealth
And gold-won sovereignty
Have me beneath their thumbs!
I say, revolt!
Rebel!
Then come what will!

TALOMAI.

How foolishly we measure life!

URIEL (*darkly*).

Well —
To me it seems
That God is on the side
Of those who have the moneybags.

TALOMAI (*half to herself*).

They tell me of a Nazarene,
Who is a craftsman's son —

URIEL (*unheeding; picking up his scroll*).

Even in this tale I read
It says, "The man was blessed, yea,
His cattle fed upon a thousand hills!"

TALOMAI (*as before*).

They say that he
Was born in Bethlehem,

Within a manger,
Years ago;
And that a star
Stood o'er the city through the night.

URIEL (*opening the scroll, he reads*).

Give heed:

“ Call that man blest who sees the sun
Her course within his kingdom run ! ”

TALOMAI (*absorbed*).

Some say he is Messias. . . .

URIEL (*arrested*).

Who?

TALOMAI.

The craftsman's son
Of Galilee.

URIEL.

Yes, I've heard. (*He lays the scroll aside.*)

TALOMAI.

Uriel —

URIEL.

Well?

TALOMAI.

I heard a rabbi read
Within the synagogue
A portion of a prophecy
Which said,
“ Bring now your tithes
Unto the Lord,
And prove me now herewith,
If I will not open unto you
The windows of heaven ;
Yea, I will pour you a blessing
That there shall not be room enough
To receive it.”

URIEL.

Aye, that were well enough
If it fulfilled itself.

TALOMAI.

I care not whether
It fulfills itself or no.
That is no gift
Which reaches for reward.
Jehovah is no bargainer.

(*Impulsively*)

O, Uriel,
For what we have
Of love and light,
Let us rejoice.

URIEL.

Try putting love and light
Into the treasury.
They'd laugh the gift
To scorn.
'Tis gold by which
They measure the gift's worth;
Silver and gold!
And we have nought —

TALOMAI (*quietly*).

Nay,
We have a single mite
Left in the house.

URIEL.

A mite. . . .
And I recall
From whence it came.
Not mine the slavery
That day — but thine.

For some such lowly task
As would offend a servant's dog —
For this the jeweled hand
Threw you a mite.

TALOMAI.

You work as hard,
My son.

URIEL.

I am a man,
Full-grown!
And you, you are —
(*He hesitates, looking at her; then instinctively the word
draws him to her*) —

My mother.
Let me remember it!
And when the world's injustice
Gnaws upon me bitterly —
When I cry out as now
Against our lowly state,
Let me remember it!
Then, when I question
What I have for thankfulness,
For need, for hunger,
And for insult's pang,
Bid me recall
That I have thee —
My mother Talomai!

TALOMAI.

Jehovah bless thee, Uriel!
As thankfulness
For this awakened love —
This quick reminder
Of our blessed share

And God's great hand —
I, too, would go
Unto the treasury.

URIEL.

To the treasury?
One goeth there to give,
Not to receive.

TALOMAI.

To give —
Yea, I would give
That which I have
Unto the Lord.

URIEL.

You'd take the mite?
The one for which
You slaved beneath the sun?
The last real piece
Of earthly coinage
We possess?

TALOMAI.

Speak not of it
As though it were
Some coin of Antioch.

URIEL.

To us it is
More precious than the rest,
Since it is all we have;
And you would
Take it to the treasury!

TALOMAI.

Not to the treasury,
But to God.

URIEL.

They'll set your gift to ridicule.

TALOMAI.

I'll go.

URIEL.

They'll cry,

“ Here comes

The starving Widow Talomai

Unto the treasury! ”

I know these temple fellows.

TALOMAI (*taking the mite from a jar on the shelf*).

I'll go.

URIEL.

They'll laugh at you.

TALOMAI.

I'll veil my face.

The mite I'll quickly drop

And then return.

Nought need be said;

No one need know.

URIEL.

But this is madness!

TALOMAI (*putting a scarf over her head*).

I'll be a moment —

URIEL.

Mother!

TALOMAI.

God keep thee, Uriel.

(*She goes. URIEL looks out of the window and then returns to his table and his scrolls. After a moment he is greeted by a young man who enters. BENAR is dressed in a girdled undertunic, cloak, headpiece and sandals.*)

BENAR.

Peace to thee, Uriel.

URIEL.

Peace to thee, Benar.

BENAR.

Why so engaged?

URIEL.

These scrolls, I know,
Are idleness,
But yet companionable
While one must rest
Throughout these holy days.
(*A bell rings faintly outside.*)
What's that?

BENAR (*going to the window*).

Come see!
The old landowner, Issachar,
Is on his way
To patronize the treasury.
His servant
Rings the bell.

URIEL.

What mockery!

BENAR (*at the window*).

Now he smiles —
The old grasper!
See how those
Gaping townsmen
Gather round.
(*URIEL joins him at the window.*)

URIEL.

Now he holds high
A moneybag.

BENAR.

Look there —
A beggar asks for alms.
Just as I thought —
Him Issachar denies

A single mite!

(*The bell is heard trailing away in the distance.*)

URIEL (*thoughtfully*).

A mite,

A single mite. . . .

BENAR (*looking at him questioningly*).

You were thinking,

I suppose, how trivial a mite

Would be,

When cast into the treasury.

URIEL (*at the table*).

Aye.

BENAR.

They'll have none of them!

I've seen the guards

Rebuke one wretch

For giving less than half a shekel.

URIEL.

'Tis so today, Benar,

That in the synagogue

As everywhere

He is most favored,

Most beloved,

Who has a goodly purse.

BENAR (*coming into the center of the room*).

Now comes this Nazarene —

He whom some call

Messias.

He cometh to this gold-mad world,

Not as a king — ah, no;

But as he styles himself,

“A servant unto men.”

URIEL (*absorbed*).

Yea.

BENAR (*with quiet disdain*).

Thou can'st well see
How he will fare!
We waited one
Who'd come in sovereignty,
With armies at his call,
A flaming sword in hand —
One who would wrest
The scepter from the lazy rich!
He comes
“A servant unto men.”
This cannot be
Messias.

URIEL (*half to himself, visibly impressed*).

He cometh then
As one of us?

BENAR.

'Tis said he sleeps within the hills.
He feeds — like the mad prophet —
On what he finds at hand.
And for —

URIEL (*quietly, as his mother spoke earlier*).

'Tis said
A star stood over Bethlehem. . . .

BENAR (*unheeding*).

And for his subjects
He has called
Some fishermen.
There's concourse for a king! (*He laughs.*)

URIEL.

Some say
He healed blind Bartemus.

BENAR (*not hearing*).

He cannot even boast

A crown!
When asked about a kingdom
He replied,
“My kingdom is not of this world.”
A king indeed!

URIEL.

'Tis said
He raised to life
The dead child of Jairus.

BENAR.

I've heard that tale.
(*Then, in a lighter tone*)
I wondered, Uriel,
If you would wish
To go to Gidon square
With me.
There's to be music there tonight.

URIEL.

I must wait Talomai.

BENAR.

Thy mother —
(*Smiling*)
Has she, too, gone
To the treasury?

URIEL (*flaring*).

What if she has?

BENAR.

I meant no harm, my friend!
I, too, am numbered with
The poor.
Therefore I feel
We might as well
Jest of our lot
As mourn of it.

URIEL.

Before the eyes of men
We may be poor,
'Tis true.
But there's a God, I hope,
Who sees the heart of such
As our mothers,
Yours and mine!
And when Messiah comes,
As it is prophesied,
He'll look upon the *soul*
Of man.

BENAR.

For such we hope.

URIEL.

He'll say — well,
As some hold
This Nazarene has said,
“ The pure in heart,
They shall be seen of God ;
The poor and meek,
And those who thirst,
Shall at the last be filled.”

BENAR.

And Talomai
Has gone unto the temple treasury?

URIEL.

Aye, that she has ;
To drop a single mite,
For which she labored
Steadily.

BENAR.

There'll be small thanks
In that.

URIEL.

Nor does she look for it.
She brings it, as she says,
Unto her God.

BENAR.

Her faith be blest.

URIEL.

'Tis more than mine,
I know.
Our faith, Benar,
Grows less with passing days.
We see the odds
Set up against us
Who are poor.

BENAR.

Aye, that we do.

URIEL.

It was an evil day
On which we turned our gaze
From God to man!
There'll be no peace for us
Again.

BENAR (*having crossed back to the window*).

Here comes your mother now.
How quietly she walks.

URIEL.

The poor have need
Of quiet walk, Benar.

BENAR.

The step of Issachar
Will beat a surer tread
When he returns.

TALOMAI (*entering; her face is touched by a strange light*).

God's peace to thee, Benar.

BENAR.

And unto thee.

URIEL (*with just a hint of irony*).

Well, mother,

You need not fear to speak.

I've told Benar

Of your enrichment

Of the treasury.

BENAR.

And I approved your courage —

Though I could

Scarce justify your act.

URIEL.

You brought your mite

Unto the treasury?

TALOMAI (*laying her headpiece aside*).

Yea, Uriel.

URIEL.

We may, I take it,

Now expect fulfillment

Of the prophecy

Which calls the doors

Of heaven to unloose

Their riches on our heads?

TALOMAI.

No prophecy need wait

To prove my gift,

My son.

The only riches

We may gather here

Are those we reap

From our own laboring.

BENAR.

Such is our lot, kind Talomai.

TALOMAI (*her face radiant*).

But for my little gift
I have my great reward. . . .

URIEL.

Well?

TALOMAI.

I have this day
Seen Jesus, whom men call
The promised one!

URIEL.

You saw him?

BENAR.

The Nazarene?

TALOMAI (*with emotion*).

I saw the Nazarene!
Just as I dropped
The mite into the vault,
Some impulse bade me look
Beside a column
Where he stood.
I met his eyes —
And someone near
Whispering said,
“ There stands the Christ! ”

URIEL (*awed*).

Did he speak
To you?

TALOMAI.

Nay.

URIEL (*quickly*).

He scorned the gift?

TALOMAI (*eagerly*).

Nay!

(*Then, after a moment*)

He looked on me,
And smiled.

URIEL.

He said nothing?

TALOMAI.

No word, my son.
But no one laughed
At me today,
No man denied
My right to bring
My own unto the Lord.
I stood, it seemed,
Before him equally
With scribe and Pharisee —
One in his eyes
With wealthy Issachar,
With merchant-men,
And those who tax the poor.
I stood as one of them today,
And dared be unafraid!

URIEL (*with rapture*).

The Lord God bless him then!

(*He turns to BENAR*)

You said he had
No crown, Benar?
Perchance he has a heart instead!
No throne?
Perhaps his throne
Is that of blessedness
And knowing human needs!
No army at his call?
God's angels may surround him
And we see them not —
We mortal blind!

(*With strong emotion*)

He looked upon my mother
And made no rebuke!

BENAR.

I'll give him thought.

TALOMAI.

He did not see my gift.
And if he did —
Ah, if he saw
Me drop my mite
Into the treasury,
He'll not condemn!
He'll understand.

URIEL (*his hand on his mother*).

Aye, mother,
He will not condemn —
If this be Christ!

TALOMAI (*quietly, visualizing*).

He smiled on me,
Whom men call Talomai!

(*She gazes into space, her hand covering the hand of URIEL,
as the curtain falls.*)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Ave Maria" *Bossi*

OPENING SENTENCES

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

HYMN: "Hail the Glorious Golden City" *Felix Adler*

LITANY

Leader: For the wealth which thou hast placed in our hands —

Congregation: We thank thee, Lord.

Leader: That it gives us an opportunity to relieve human agony —

Congregation: We thank thee, Lord.

Leader: For the privilege which is ours of sharing in the development of human character and civic achievement through the distribution of this wealth —

Congregation: We thank thee, Lord.

Leader: For the privilege which is ours of so distributing our money that there shall be opportunity for life, education and happiness for all —

Congregation: We thank thee, Lord.

Leader: For the privilege which is ours so to speak and act through our wealth that thy kingdom may come and thy will may be done on earth as it is now done in heaven —

Congregation: We thank thee, Lord.

THE LORD'S PRAYER, *in unison*

PRAYER

Lord, we praise thee for all thy gifts to us, for thy countless mercies showered upon us. Freely we have received, freely help us to give. Since we have received from thee and our fellow men gifts beyond our means to repay, grant we may never become victims of a grasping, selfish spirit.

O thou Christ of God, who gavest thyself in love to every roadside beggar, remember us. Thou hast greatly enriched us from the resources of thy kingdom. Give us strength to master the burdens which lie heavily upon every heart. Enable us to meet the challenge of these trying days. Grant us to know the joy which comes with unselfishness. As opportunity comes to us may we give of ourselves and our wealth that thy kingdom may come and thy will be done among us.

We give thee but thine own, O Lord,
Whate'er our gift may be;
All that we have is thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from thee.

OFFERTORY QUARTET: "Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us" *Neidlinger*

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Mark 21:1-4

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

HYMN: "Master, no Offering, Costly and Sweet" *Parker*

BENEDICTION

May the love of God the Father and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, his Son, rest upon all who sincerely put their trust in him. Amen.

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Marche Pontificale" *Lemmons*

THIN ICE

CHARACTERS

CALCON

STREETER

HARKNESS

SCRANTON

KRAEGER

STRAIG (*pronounced Străg*)

Scene: An office.

Time: A mid-summer afternoon, the present.

An office high above the business district of a city. Its furnishings are simple, substantial pieces, consisting of a long directors' table and accompanying chairs, with two occasional chairs of red leather offside. On the table are a portfolio and papers, a clock facing toward back, and a cradle telephone.



THIN ICE

A group of well-dressed men of early middle age is gathered in the room. CALCON and HARKNESS are standing, while SCRANTON, KRAEGER, and STREETER are seated.

CALCON. The trouble with our whole endeavor, gentlemen, is that we are trying to do in a day what can't be done in a century.

STREETER. I disagree with you, Calcon. You should have said *two* centuries. (KRAEGER chuckles.)

HARKNESS. Shall we give it up?

CALCON. Why not?

HARKNESS. Just a moment. We've been here practically all day trying to draw up a code for a union of faiths. We represent the five largest denominational bodies in America. We were selected by them to lay plans for one great union in order that Protestantism might at last present a united front against the forces of antagonism and strife.

SCRANTON. Why review that, Harkness?

HARKNESS. This office was put at our disposal. We came here full of tolerance and high purpose, all set to do something phenomenal. You, Calcon, were the most ambitious of all. You said we were no longer children that we had to quibble, but the minute we differed with you on the old, old question of baptism you refused to budge.

CALCON. I couldn't let a doctrinal subject like that go unchallenged. You wanted to leave it out of the code entirely.

KRAEGER (*smiling*). You were a little intolerant, Calcon.

CALCON. Not any more than you were about transubstantiation.

KRAEGER. Well, transubstantiation. . . .

STREETER. Perhaps five men can't decide for fifty million.

SCRANTON. It's turned out to be just another squabble. Let's admit it, take our beating like men and go home.

KRAEGER. Agreed. (*They prepare to adjourn.*)

CALCON. I suggest we sing at least one verse of "Blest be the tie that binds." (*The men, with the exception of HARKNESS, smile; KRAEGER chuckles.*)

HARKNESS. Please, gentlemen. You know, the whole affair is treated too lightly. Don't you realize we have it in our hands to do a positively revolutionary thing? This is a movement for which the world has been preparing itself for generations. Are you ready to say we've failed?

KRAEGER. Well, where shall we start?

HARKNESS. I suggest we start with fundamentals.

SCRANTON. Viewed in their deepest nature, all phases of religion are fundamental. Maybe that's our difficulty.

CALCON. There are cogent fundamentals.

HARKNESS. Let us begin our code by calling people to the fact that there is one God.

STREETER. Wrong approach, Harkness. There's supposed to be only one baptism, too, and look where that got us.

SCRANTON. I think if we could decide whether the cosmic God is the same as the personal God we might get somewhere.

KRAEGER. Are we ready to acknowledge that God *is* personal?

SCRANTON. Aren't we?

CALCON. I am.

STREETER. It depends on what you *mean* by personal. I hope you don't mean that God is organic. That would be as good as sacrilege.

HARKNESS. The trouble with us is we are skating around on the thin ice of speculative philosophy. I don't think any definition of God can be adequate or final.

KRAEGER. But you said —

HARKNESS. I said we should simply begin by saying some-

thing like this: "The United Church" — or whatever the merger will be named — "believes in the one true living God."

STREETER. That's all very well for us who've made religion our life work. But we must learn to put our mind alongside the mind of the man in the street.

CALCON. Right! And he has to be told in plain, unsophisticated terms how he can picture God.

KRAEGER. He wants to know if God hears prayers, if he is still the God of Moses or —

HARKNESS. I merely wanted to suggest a starting point. We must start somewhere.

SCRANTON. Or else adjourn.

HARKNESS. The really fundamental things are those which touch life. That's what we are ultimately driving at. Enrichment of the individual, recognition of talent, improvement of the social order. . . .

CALCON. You know, Harkness, I strongly suspect you're a humanist.

HARKNESS. What if I am?

KRAEGER. Do your people know it?

HARKNESS. Oh, come, Kraeger!

KRAEGER. Then I'll bet you don't believe in sanctification by faith. (*There is a moment's silence broken by a sigh from SCRANTON.*)

SCRANTON. Another sortie with the giant Denominationalism is ending in puffs and heavy sighs. I move we let the women try it next time.

HARKNESS. I'm afraid we all came here with certain preconceived notions which we had hoped would be substantiated.

KRAEGER. All I hoped was that we might be able to lay down certain vital and fundamental principles; principles which would be consistent with what our people have always believed.

STREETER. What do you mean by "our people"?

HARKNESS. Come, gentlemen, surely they are *all* our people.

Let us approach this whole question from an ethical point of view for a change. Think what we have to offer these fifty million and more! A unity of fellowship, for one thing, in which the stupendous power of the Infinite can have full sway.

CALCON. Harkness, there's not one of us who hasn't the vision, but good grief! We must retain the basic sacraments of Christianity!

KRAEGER. I agree.

HARKNESS. Very well, let's begin there.

SCRANTON. Rebirth — put that down, Calcon. (*The men make a pretense of getting down to business.*)

CALCON. Incarnation ought to be first —

STREETER. First let's admit that the universe taken as a whole is God, that he is the essence of the combined forces which —

KRAEGER. Streeter, that's out-and-out pantheism!

STREETER. Why give it a name? I despise this finagling about terminology! You believe it, don't you?

KRAEGER. Not as pantheism, never! God is tangible Spirit!

CALCON. That's naïve.

HARKNESS. After all, the word "God" is a symbol for the unfathomable reality to which it points.

KRAEGER. They'd label that heresy in my denomination.

SCRANTON. I believe you're a mystic, Harkness!

HARKNESS. I'm a Christian! But I am interested in every phase and angle of positive belief. More than that, I am interested in humanity. If you read your papers this morning you probably saw an account of the mad chemist who escaped from the sanitarium at Four Hills. I'm interested in that man because he is a part of humanity. I believe there is hope for him because he has dared to *think*. We are stagnating!

SCRANTON. You mean, because we call things by their right names?

HARKNESS. There is no right name for anything. I was thinking of our hidebound delusions.

CALCON. Speaking of the mad chemist, I hear he was a member of your denomination, Streeter.

STREETER. That's right. You see where this proposed unity might get you, eh? (*SCRANTON laughs softly, CALCON takes it good-humoredly.*)

HARKNESS. Nonsense.

KRAEGER. I heard about his insanity this morning. A friend of mine told me the weirdest story. I can't laugh about it. . . . (*They look at him a moment.*)

SCRANTON. All chemists are mad.

STREETER. We haven't much license to throw stones.

SCRANTON. Let's go home. We've given ourselves a good whipping. (*Again there is indication of possible departure.*)

CALCON. We don't have to say we failed. We can think the whole thing over. It looks chaotic enough now, but perhaps after sober reflection —

HARKNESS (*holding them with his words*). Our giving up this way is an open admission that we *have* failed. You know that as well as I. The key men of the country's five great Protestant faiths have failed. The press — the press will tell us about it. We've threshed straw all day. We began with the premise that a unity of faith is needful and refuted it by our own bigotry.

SCRANTON. We all want to be popes, that's the trouble.

CALCON. It can't be done on a large scale.

HARKNESS. Yes, it can, Calcon, if we'd be honest with ourselves.

CALCON. Good grief! I haven't lied about anything.

HARKNESS (*gathering up his papers*). We coddle unessentials.

KRAEGER. Religion has no unessentials.

STREETER. Shall we try to start once more —

CALCON. No.

STREETER. — say with the divinity of Jesus?

SCRANTON. That's the most delicate and dangerous of all. Why, in a recent questionnaire circulated among the men of our denomination there were — (*he has opened a small notebook*) — Would you like to hear?

KRAEGER. I would.

CALCON. It depends on what you mean by the divinity of Jesus. If you mean virgin birth —

KRAEGER. That's what our denomination means by the term, yes.

STREETER. Well, ours doesn't.

SCRANTON (*reading*). Twenty per cent of those who returned their questionnaires expressed their belief that Jesus was born of a virgin; forty-two voted against it; sixteen were noncommittal; twelve per cent said they had stopped thinking about it; six said some days they believed and some days they disbelieved; four per cent said they expected to settle the question before the end of the present church year.

HARKNESS. That report seems to prove the question unessential.

STREETER. On the contrary, Harkness, the attitudes of these men convey for the most part only lethargy and indifference. That's the trouble with the church at large.

KRAEGER. Perhaps we ought to take Rowland Hill's viewpoint. You remember he once said, "I do not want the walls of separation between different orders of Christians to be destroyed, but only lowered that we may shake hands a little easier over them."

HARKNESS. He was afraid to hope for more than that. That was in 1790. A century and a half should show some progress, I hope.

SCRANTON. Let's admit we're not up to it. Religious differ-

ences are too deeply embedded to be pulled up in a day or a century.

CALCON. Denominations cannot be annihilated.

HARKNESS. It is not our intention to annihilate anything. We want to weld them into one. The denominational unit has at last realized its interdependence with and relation to the others. (*He suddenly puts aside his papers. Then, determinedly*) Gentlemen, we dare not fail! Our people have realized that while we are all reaching for the same thing we do so over barriers. We strive against each other while underneath is a strong current ready to sweep us into an everlasting brotherhood of man! I say, we dare not fail.

CALCON. I repeat, it can't be done on a large scale.

KRAEGER. As long as there is individuality there will be differences. We'd better go on as we have in the past.

SCRANTON. This cannot be done artificially. A brotherhood of faiths must grow naturally without any mechanical stimulus.

CALCON. We haven't scratched the surface of our differences. Could our denominations ever agree on prayer, sin, or immortality? I'll say they couldn't. Religious belief is innate.

HARKNESS. Very well, most of us happen to be what we are by the accident of birth. Are you ready to look at it in that way?

CALCON. You're bringing us around nicely to the subject of predestination.

SCRANTON. Let's give it up.

STREETER. We simply haven't learned that union is stronger than witchcraft.

KRAEGER. Witchcraft?

HARKNESS. Gentlemen, why can't we keep pace with life?

SCRANTON. We won't get anywhere, I tell you. (*They are on the point of breaking up the meeting.*)

CALCON. You can't coerce people's spiritual beliefs.

SCRANTON (*with finality*). So let's give up.

(*He is about to leave. CALCON and KRAEGER are ready to follow. HARKNESS remains resolutely at the table. STREETER is confining himself to a weary, deprecatory gesture. Just then the door is thrown open and STRAIG, the mad chemist, bursts into the room. He is a dominant figure and holds the men with a wild gaze.*)

STRAIG. You are going to die! Do you hear me? You are going to die! (*His eyes flash from one to the other and finally rest on the clock.*) Is that clock right? (*The men are silent; he confronts them fiercely.*) Is that clock right?

HARKNESS. Yes.

STRAIG. Ten minutes to three. . . . At three we die! They've been after me for days. I could have stopped them with a motion of my hand! I've been hiding here since morning. (*As STREETER makes a motion toward the phone*) Keep away from that telephone!

STREETER. You're the — chemist, aren't you? Straig, I believe the papers called you.

STRAIG. Who knows who I am? Maybe I was a chemist. Now I'm a god! I'm Death! (*He clutches a small vial in his hand.*) When I open this vial we die! All life stops at three o'clock.

CALCON (*easily*). If we have until three, let's sit down and talk it over.

STRAIG. Is that the best thing you can think of? Talk? You'd better talk to God. It was on a Friday that they killed the Christ. At three o'clock he died. And at three o'clock I destroy humanity. That's my task. That's why I was born. That's why I was able to discover the toxicant. . . . A cubic centimeter destroys a city. It will be a lesson to the rest of the world.

HARKNESS (*studying him quietly*). Of course, it will be a lesson.

SCRANTON. So you are the mad chemist. The papers carried the story of how you claimed you could kill vegetation, too. (*With a smile*) That's remarkable.

STRAIG. Laugh! Laugh at me! The dead don't laugh! (*Vehemently*) Sit down, all of you! Sit down, I tell you! (*They seat themselves deliberately with the exception of KRAEGER, who sinks awed into his chair.*) Now — who are you?

HARKNESS. We are men. We are your brothers. Our difference lies only in the fact that we want to construct while you want to destroy.

STRAIG. Humanity is worth destroying.

STREETER. That's better than saying it is not worth destroying.

STRAIG. You are strange men. You try to joke while you have minutes to live.

CALCON. Perhaps we joke because we do not believe you.

STRAIG. Yesterday I drove a milligram of this into the ground and it destroyed a field. Yesterday I killed rats with it, today I kill men! Don't believe it! Soon you shall know. I wait! (*He stands statue-like against the door.*)

STREETER (*with an ironical smile*). Why wait, Mr. Straig? You must know that our calculation of time is much different than it was in Judea. Why not open the vial now and get it over with? (*STRAIG stares at him a moment, and takes the vial in both his hands.*)

KRAEGER (*in panic*). Streeter, you fool! You don't know what you're saying! He can destroy us! (*An atmosphere of fear and tension suddenly engulfs the scene.*)

CALCON. What?

KRAEGER (*to STRAIG*). Don't open that!

STRAIG. So — you believe!

KRAEGER. I know! Listen, you men! I learned about it yesterday from a reliable source. They haven't let it be known but

he has a medium that can destroy every living thing for miles around. Don't stare at me! Don't sit there! We're doomed — doomed, I tell you!

STRAIG. And if you come near me, if you try to get away, I'll break this on the floor! Of course you're doomed. So am I. But I was born to do this!

CALCON. Kraeger — you can't be serious.

KRAEGER. We are dead men!

STRAIG (*grimly*). Why not think of poetry and songs at such a time? Perhaps,

“Death wounds to cure; we fall, we rise, we reign,
Spring from our fetters, fasten in the skies —
Where blooming Eden withers in our sight.
Death gives us more than was in Eden lost,
The king of terrors is the prince of peace!”

(*Suspense and silence follow; then he turns to the clock.*) Tick; go on ticking! After we are gone will you still count out your minutes, will your hands still go around with no one to see them? Gentlemen, . . . a picture of futility! (*He suddenly bursts into hollow, crazed laughter.*)

KRAEGER. Stop it! (*He is gradually losing control of himself.*)

SCRANTON. Kraeger!

STRAIG. I will wait. (*He resumes his former position.*)

KRAEGER. What can we do? Let's make a fight for it. If — if we must die — Die! It's too preposterous! It's preposterous, I tell you.

STREETER. Let's not lose our heads.

HARKNESS. It's ironical, if it's really true. If it isn't all a dream.

SCRANTON. I wouldn't be so romantic about it, Harkness.

HARKNESS. I don't mean to be. But these moments do have a pretty leveling influence. What if we *are* all facing death? What then?

STREETER. There's no use getting panicky about it.

CALCON. You say that easily, Streeter, because you still doubt that he can do it. He's mad, I tell you! Stark, raving mad! And Kraeger said —

KRAEGER. We will die! (*STRAIG remains cold and fixed.*)

HARKNESS. I don't want to be romantic as Scranton insinuates. But somehow I feel very near to all of you men. We have suddenly become one. A common fear seems to crowd us together. For the first time today we see not our differences but our similarity. We are men awaiting death.

CALCON. I'm not thinking of myself. I'm thinking of — of those who belong to me — those who are waiting for me. I'm thinking of —

KRAEGER (*fiercely to STRAIG*). If there's a spark of sanity in you, listen to me! We are men like yourself! You have some wild idea about avenging Christ! Religion is our business. We've given our lives to it! Listen to me!

CALCON (*unnerved*). Give us that vial! We'll see that you are protected!

SCRANTON (*upset*). You can't destroy and kill if you believe in God.

STREETER. That's right, Straig. "Thou shalt not kill!"

HARKNESS (*evenly to STRAIG*). You are a strange person to want to kill yourself as well. Let's talk it over. As Kraeger has said, religion is our business. If you believe in Jesus, prove it. (*There is a moment of suspense.*) What do you say?

STRAIG. I wait. Five minutes and my mission will be fulfilled. We die — together.

KRAEGER (*screaming*). No! (*He pounds the table.*) We can overpower you!

STRAIG (*wildly*). Sit down! (*KRAEGER sinks quietly into his chair.*)

HARKNESS. For a moment, gentlemen, we see that an extremity drives us into a corner. We cannot rely on creeds now —

CALCON (*cutting in*). Oh, stop it! (*Silence.*)

STREETER (*quietly*). Go on, Harkness.

HARKNESS. I must go on even though the words are never heard again. At this moment we are not thinking of creeds, we are thinking of God.

SCRANTON (*half to himself*). If I die —

CALCON. It's maddening! (*Hysterically to STRAIG*) Break it! I dare you to break it!

SCRANTON. Don't be a fool, Calcon!

STREETER. How petty all our arguing was before. What about *fundamentals* now? What about preconceived ideas? Yes, what about creeds? I tell you, men, the world needs only to remember it must die!

HARKNESS. Reason fails. Differences disappear. Doubt, skepticism, selfishness, intolerance — all are gone now. Only one thing remains: we are mortals, we are brothers! Above denominations stands brotherhood! Above denominations stands humanity!

CALCON. If I could go back — if we could all go back and tell our people what we feel just now!

STREETER. You put it well, Harkness. Above denominations stands humanity! We think we are suddenly confronted with this divine event; that we must die. On the contrary, it has confronted us every day. That is the common denominator of life.

SCRANTON. For the first time I see how unnecessary it is to comprehend God.

HARKNESS. The vision has come to us — too late perhaps — but it has come. We feel now that those who have brought God to men tried to build lives, not organizations. They had only one desire and that was to make God articulate in man.

KRAEGER. There is no death! If we ever believed let us believe now!

CALCON. I believe it!

KRAEGER (*as before, to STRAIG*). Do you hear? There is no death!

STREETER. "The children of God cannot die!"

SCRANTON. I believe!

HARKNESS. We remember now how Jesus said —

STRAIG (*interrupting*). It is time! All my life has been moving toward this moment. I am ready to fulfill my work. Vengeance — vengeance is mine! Vengeance for the Crucified! Let all the powers of death pour out revenge. For this purpose was I born. It has been a fever in my blood — now let it be a lesson to men! Laugh! Why doesn't somebody laugh? I can laugh — here, I'll teach you! One laugh before we die! (*He throws back his head and laughs sardonically.*)

KRAEGER. Stop! (*In the moment HARKNESS with one quick grasp wrests the vial from Straig's unsuspecting hand.*)

CALCON (*the following lines are almost simultaneous*). Careful, Harkness!

SCRANTON. Look out for him!

(*Silence and suspense follow. STRAIG stares at HARKNESS. Suddenly he cringes before them.*)

STRAIG. The curse! The curse is upon me! I was afraid. Fear has beaten me! Whenever I wanted to destroy, something held my hand! Fear — fear — fear — (*He goes unsteadily to a chair and buries his head in his hands.*)

CALCON (*to STREETER, nearest the telephone*). Call the authorities, Streeter.

STRAIG. No! It won't do you any good. They'll never get me! (*He goes to the door.*)

HARKNESS. Where are you going?

STRAIG. Into tomorrow. They'll be after me again and I won't be able to destroy them. I could have stopped them with a motion of my hand! You've won! (*Fiercely*) You've won, do you hear?

HARKNESS. It isn't much of a victory.

SCRANTON. Hold him!

STRAIG. No man can hold me. You have the vial, break it and avenge. Someone must avenge. I am cursed — cursed — cursed — fear has beaten me — beaten me — (*He tears open the door and disappears, his voice fading in the distance.*)

HARKNESS. Whew!

KRAEGER. That was daring of you, Harkness.

STREETER. We'll call the police.

KRAEGER. That would get us into all sorts of trouble and publicity.

CALCON (*to HARKNESS*). You must be careful with that.

HARKNESS (*looking at the vial*). We don't know whether —

SCRANTON. Kraeger said —

KRAEGER. It's a poisonous vapor. I have it on good authority.

CALCON. I'd give it to some reputable chemist.

SCRANTON. Bury it! That's what I'd do!

STREETER. I'd throw it into the river.

HARKNESS. It's well sealed. I'll take care of it.

CALCON. We shouldn't have let him get away.

KRAEGER. It doesn't seem real. Harkness, who knows what you've done! Maybe you *have* saved the city.

HARKNESS. No, it doesn't seem real. But I know that for a moment we thought we were facing death. We were forced into a wonderful alliance — an alliance of thought, impulse and spirit.

STREETER. Don't say, "We were." We *are*. I still feel my nearness to all of you. I still feel that a certain union has been born in our hearts.

CALCON (*but not convincingly*). Well, I do, too.

HARKNESS. What we experience, my friends, is only a foretaste of that unity and concord that can be born among our people.

SCRANTON. If — if they would be in the position we were in a few moments ago, yes.

HARKNESS. I can't concede even that, Scranton. The undercurrent about which I spoke earlier today has suddenly engulfed us and lifted us into a consciousness of man's oneness with his fellows.

CALCON. We mustn't let our emotions run away with us again.

STREETER. I don't know whether this is emotion or reason or what. Terribly steeped as we are in our individualism, an uncanny sympathy gripped us for a while.

KRAEGER. I suppose it is just because I am rationalizing, but I don't want to confine my perspective to this little room. When we get outside, when the cool air strikes our faces, when we get back into the vortex of life, so to say, then we will have to recall the old rules, the old approaches, the old fundamentals.

STREETER. Are you going to start that again, Kraeger?

HARKNESS. You are trampling this experience under the foot of sheer selfishness!

KRAEGER. I am thinking of the masses now, not of myself.

SCRANTON. No doubt people do have to get into like situations before they can understand the meaning of this common denominator.

CALCON. Really, gentlemen, I don't see why we can't have unity and brotherhood while still retaining our denomination-alism.

KRAEGER. There will certainly always be individual interpretations. We all respond differently under like circumstances.

STREETER (*pointedly*). So I've noticed.

CALCON (*laughing*). That was two-edged, Streeter. Well, I must be going.

KRAEGER. Let's not let this afternoon's adventure get out. We wouldn't be believed and we might be laughed at.

HARKNESS. I am appalled at our indecision. I marvel how quickly we can become estranged from one another. We are really callous, apathetic creatures. We need death itself, yes, more than death, to bring us into a spiritual allegiance with each other and our God!

SCRANTON. That's putting it pretty strong!

HARKNESS. I wish I could temper it. Selfish individualism is at the root of our trouble. It is reflected here and flashes through the whole of Christendom. In a moment we will be back where we started, still hugging our age-old differences. Gentlemen, there is no conflict in God!

CALCON (*taking his hat*). The trouble with you, Harkness, and the trouble with the rest of us is that we speak too much in symbols. Coming, Scranton?

SCRANTON. I think I will. I'm terribly unnerved. (*He and CALCON are ready to leave.*) Do be careful with that vial, Harkness. (*They exit.*)

KRAEGER. This hasn't been entirely futile. We've learned that the thin ice of differences can be broken for a time. (*He looks at STREETER and HARKNESS for a moment, smiles wanly and goes out.*)

HARKNESS (*seating himself heavily*). Thin ice. . . .

STREETER. There's a lot of thin ice in the world, my friend. We stood on some this afternoon. . . . But for all his quibbling Kraeger is not altogether wrong. This hasn't been futile. A little more time, a little more tolerance, a few more madmen with death potions, and perhaps we will raise the idea of the brotherhood of man from a vision to a reality. A little more suffering and men will probably break down the walls which support their petty views.

HARKNESS (*half to himself*). I wonder. . . .
(*The lights fade out.*)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Chanson Triste" *Tschaikowsky*

SILENCE, *for a space*

After a few minutes of silence the leader will say:

Father, in thy mysterious presence kneeling,

Fain would our souls feel all thy kindling love;

For we are weak, and need some deep revealing

Of trust and strength and calmness from above.

— *Samuel Johnson*

HYMN: "Blest Be the Tie that Binds" *Fawcett*

PRAYER

O God of Peace, who through thy Son Jesus Christ didst send forth one faith for the salvation of mankind: Send thy grace and heavenly blessing upon all Christian people who are striving to draw nearer to thee, and to each other, in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace. Give us penitence for our divisions, wisdom to know the truth, courage to do thy will, love that shall break down the barriers of pride and prejudice, and an unswerving loyalty to thy holy name. Suffer us not to shirk from any endeavor which is in accordance with thy will, for the peace and unity of thy church. Give us boldness to seek only thy glory and the advancement of thy kingdom. Unite us all in thee as thou, O Father, with thy Son and the Holy Spirit, art one God, world without end. Amen.

— *Manual of Prayers for Unity*

HYMN RESPONSE. *The leader will read his lines, the organ will play as the congregation sings.*

Leader: To carry on the work of Jesus Christ after his

ascension, our heavenly Father planned the Christian church.

Congregation:

I love thy church, O God;
Her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And graven on thy hand.

Leader: The organization and progress of the Christian church was a difficult task. The early history of the church is one of martyrs. Consecration and sacrifice were essential qualities for membership in it.

Congregation:

For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend,
To her my cares and toils be given
Till toils and cares shall end.

Leader: Christians of the trying days of history were distinguished by their love of the brethren, by their faithfulness to the vows of the church, and by their diligence in good service.

Congregation:

Beyond my highest joy
I prize her heavenly ways,
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
Her hymns of love and praise.

Leader: And there was always the thought that if the unfriendly world should finally triumph over the body of the saints, there would be the hope of heaven.

Congregation:

Sure as the truth shall last,
To Zion shall be given
The brightest glories earth can yield,
And brighter bliss of heaven.

Leader: Today the emphasis has changed. The dream of

all Christians is for a Christlike order. We seek the peace and harmony of the church and the Christian joy of all nations. The kingdoms of this world must become the kingdom of our Lord.

Congregation:

Sure as the truth shall last,
To Zion shall be given
The brightest glories earth can yield,
And brighter bliss of heaven.

OFFERTORY: *Choir Anthem*, "Grant Me True Courage, Lord"
Bach

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

HYMN: "The Church's One Foundation" *Samuel J. Stone*

BENEDICTION

Now may the peace of God, the great Father of the church, unite us all in the common dream of unity and brotherhood. Amen.

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Be not Afraid," from *Elijah* *Mendelssohn*

THE CURSE O' GOD

CHARACTERS

SID STEWART, *forty-five*

JERUSHA STEWART

AMANDA STEWART

ALIVIA STEWART

} *his older half-sisters*

Scene: A midwestern farmhouse.

Time: The present.

The kitchen of the Stewart sisters' home on a midwestern farm. Downstage right is a table covered with a checkered cloth upon which, among other objects, is an old, brass-clasped family Bible. There are accompanying chairs and down left is a wheel chair. At back an oil stove, a cupboard, and a curtained stand supporting a water-pail. A wall-telephone is fixed in the back wall and a window looks out over the farmyard. It is seven-thirty of a spring morning.

THE CURSE O' GOD

After repeated knocks on the door at right, to which there is no response, SID STEWART enters. He is a man of forty-five who appears slightly older because of a hunted, emaciated expression and a noticeable stoop of his shoulders. He coughs intermittently, a sickly, tubercular cough which he tries vainly to suppress. His face is weather-beaten and darkened by a stubble of beard. His eyes are pale and kindly.

SID (*crossing to the stairway and calling*). Amanda! Hey, Amanda! Where are ya?

JERUSHA (*from upstairs*). Who's there?

SID. It's me, Sid.

JERUSHA (*metallically*). Sid? What d'ya want?

SID. Where's Amanda? (*Jerusha's determined steps are heard on the stairs and she appears, all too soon, to confront SID.*)

JERUSHA (*defiantly*). What d'ya want?

SID. Jerusha, I —

JERUSHA. Ya got yer nerve, ain't ya? Breakin' into the house!

SID. Jerusha — Billy's sick and I thought ya might have a chicken to spare. We thought some broth'd be the —

JERUSHA (*snorting*). He ain't never been well. I wouldn't bother a heap over the likes o' him. He's *blind*. Broth ain't goin' ta help him none.

SID. It won't hurt him, that's sure.

JERUSHA (*plowing on*). Blind! And ya know why! The fruit o' sin, that's what he is! The curse o' God!

SID. I'd mend my talk if I was ya, Jerusha. (*He coughs.*)

JERUSHA. Don't Jerusha me! Ya could have as much as any o' us if ya hadn't let yer wife's folks take it away from ya! Ya wouldn't have ta come spongin' chickens off'n us!

SID. I'd pay fer 'em if I could, Jerusha.

JERUSHA. I s'pose ya would! Ya think just because ya happen ta be a half-brother o' ourn ya kin git anythin' ya want just fer askin' and showin' a long face — and coughin' yer silly cough!

SID. Billy's sick, Jerusha.

JERUSHA. 'Taint our fault! We've given ya all that was yourn accordin' ta law. An' as fer Billy — *he's blind!*

SID. Blind or not blind, I don't want him ta — ta die.

JERUSHA. It's the curse o' God, Sid Stewart! We've told ya that afore!

SID (*holding his ground*). I don't believe it.

JERUSHA. It is!

SID (*rebelliously*). I tell ya it ain't!

JERUSHA. Ya ain't goin' ta raise yer voice in this house, I tell ya that!

SID. Then don't say them things! (*He coughs.*)

JERUSHA. It's the truth! Ya know how Billy was born 'fore ya was even married!

SID. Don't start that agin!

JERUSHA. Some day yer other 'uns 'll get the same way!

SID. Stop it!

JERUSHA. I tell ya, I won't have ya screamin' at me! Ya'll have Alivia hearin' us in a minute!

SID. Well, don't say them things! Billy was born blind an' the rest of 'em weren't. I don't see no curse in that! It ain't no curse fer Alivia ta be deaf, is it?

JERUSHA. Alivia's gettin' old. Them things come with age — it ain't nat'ral fer a baby ta come blind.

SID (*disturbéd*). Ya don't know nothin' about it. (*He coughs and goes to the water-pail.*)

JERUSHA. What ya goin' ta do?

SID. What d'ya suppose? Did ya think I was goin' ta take a bath?

JERUSHA (*snatching the dipper*). Ya ain't goin' ta drink out o' the dipper, I tell ya that!

SID (*grimly*). Gad, ya'd think I was a leper.

JERUSHA. Some things is just's bad! (*She sets an old tin cup on the stand.*) There, drink out o' that.

SID. How kin ya be that way, Jerusha?

JERUSHA (*snorting*). Ya don't think I'm a fool, do ya, even though I am yer half-sister? We ain't fergot the shame ya brought on us six years back when it came out that the baby was comin'. (*SID coughs while she pours water from the dipper into his cup.*) Ya think ya kin disgrace us one minute an' have us kissin' ya the next. Well, we won't!

SID. Ya kin at least treat me like a human bein'!

JERUSHA. Don't insinuate that we didn't, Sid Stewart! Ya got what was yourn when old maw died. We ain't interfered with the law!

SID. The law! Gad, ya people that do things accordin' ta the law! There ain't no mercy in the law!

JERUSHA. Humph! Where'd ya get that? Out o' the Bible?

SID. Maybe I did.

JERUSHA. Ya don't never go ta church. We've spoke of it fer the past six years. Ya ain't never come — nor yer wife. She ain't the prayin' kind, though.

SID. Marthy does too pray! Maybe she don't do it from the roof like some folks. (*He coughs.*)

JERUSHA. Stop that silly coughin'.

SID. Wisht I could. (*There is an awkward silence for just a moment.*) Kin I get a chicken?

JERUSHA. What d'ya do with the money ya get off the county?

SID. We ain't had a cent from the county since I'm workin' in the gravel pit. Marthy 'n' me's been honest about that.

JERUSHA. Honest! Humph! Ya was honest, too, when she

went ta her old aunt's an' had the baby 'fore you an' she was married!

SID. I wish ya'd hold yer mouth about that!

JERUSHA. It ain't so easy, Sid Stewart! It ain't no sin ta talk about a sin. It was awful what ya done!

SID. If it'd a-happened ta you it mighta made a woman out o' ya!

JERUSHA (*dumbfounded*). That's enough! Get out, I tell ya, ya dirty, insultin' rat! (*She advances on him menacingly when a slamming of the porch door is heard and a shuffling of feet announces the entrance of AMANDA. She is the "practical" one — a gaunt, solemn, strait-laced mortal, quick-spoken and unbending. There is a depressing, dirge-like atmosphere about her. Her attire at the moment consists of an old bonnet, a somber, tight-fitting dress, an apron, and heavy, ill-shaped shoes.*)

AMANDA (*steeling herself against SID; to JERUSHA*). What's the yellin' about, Jerusha?

JERUSHA. The insultin' dirty-mouthed dog!

AMANDA (*hoarsely*). What ya doin' under our roof, Sidney?

JERUSHA. D'ya have ta *ask*, Amanda? He ain't *bringin'* us nothin' ya kin be sure! Less it be trouble — or disgrace!

SID. Billy's sick, Mandy. I thought mebbe some broth — if we could get a chicken —

JERUSHA. Fer the askin' —

AMANDA. Ain't ya workin'? Somebody said ya was in the gravel pit.

SID. That's right. But it ain't very much I kin earn that way.

AMANDA. Chickens don't just spring up by themselves.

JERUSHA. An' the county ain't helpin' us, ya kin bet!

SID. I wouldn't a-come if I could a-bought one, Mandy. (*JERUSHA snorts.*) Every cent we been able to scrape together's gone ta the doctor.

JERUSHA. Doctor?

AMANDA (*simultaneously*). What doctor?

SID. Fer blind Billy. A doctor's been a-comin' up from Topeka oncet a week ta Billy — and he thinks there's hope. Mebbe any day, he says, the bandages kin be took off an' mebbe — mebbe he kin see! Gad, think of it! Mebbe Billy kin see!

JERUSHA. Humph!

AMANDA. The doctor just wants yer money.

SID. A drownin' man'll grab at a straw, Mandy. (*He coughs.*)

AMANDA. Humph!

SID. I know I ain't worth helpin' much. Jerusha's right, I'm just a sinner. But fer the sake o' God an' Marthy, ferget me an' try an' think o' them!

JERUSHA (*aghast*). God and yer sinnin' wife! I'd be ashamed ta name 'em in the same breath! Don't go forgettin' that you're under our roof, Sid Stewart!

AMANDA. An' ya ain't got a cent o' claim on it no more either.

SID. I know all that, Mandy. I didn't come out here ta quarrel. I'm not feelin' good myself. I walked out here 'cause I — I needed yer help. We're all o' us goin' hungry.

JERUSHA. An' now we're good enough! Huh!

SID. Ya've always been good enough fer me. It was the other way 'round. There's been days I've wanted ta come ta ya — days when I wouldn't a-needed ta ask fer nothin'. But it was you disownin' *me*.

JERUSHA. Ta hear ya talk!

SID. Please, Jerusha. I don't wanna quarrel. That's no good. But if ya would help me out just this oncet. The doctor's comin' today an' —

ALIVIA (*from upstairs*). Amanda!

JERUSHA. What's she want?

AMANDA. Want's ta be helped down, I s'pose. (*Calling*)
What d'ya want?

JERUSHA. Aw, go up ta her. She can't hear ya.

ALIVIA. Amanda!

AMANDA (*grudgingly*). All right. I'm comin'.

JERUSHA. Well, if ya have ta help her much more mebbe ya'll fix her bed down here like I told ya.

AMANDA. If I'd knowed she was goin' ta last this long there's lots of things I might a-done. (*She exits.*)

SID. Mandy shouldn't say that.

JERUSHA. Shut yer sinnin' mouth, Sid Stewart!

SID. Jerusha — how kin ya be like that?

JERUSHA. If I'd ever pay ya in yer own coin, ya'd have reason ta talk! "Fer the sake o' God an' Marthy!" An' ya wonder why ya've got the curse on ya!

AMANDA (*offstage, coming down the stairs with ALIVIA; loudly*). — ta beg some hens off'n us.

ALIVIA (*offstage*). Sidney?

AMANDA. Yes, Sidney.

(*They appear. ALIVIA leans on the arm of AMANDA who leads her to the wheel chair. ALIVIA, oldest of the sisters, is an invalid. She is slight, palsied, wrinkled, but is the one compassionate soul in the Stewart home. She is deaf, much to the annoyance of JERUSHA and AMANDA. The traits of the deaf are revealed in her halting speech, her habit of repetition, and her interpretation of movements around her. She smiles at SIDNEY, much to the embarrassment of the others.*)

ALIVIA. Sidney.

SID (*brightening a bit*). Hello, Livy.

JERUSHA. Humph!

AMANDA (*to SID, softly enough to escape ALIVIA*). Don't think she's forgive ya!

ALIVIA. I'm glad to see you, Sidney. I've been thinking about you lately. How's Billy? (*The remark comes like a bolt out of a clear sky. JERUSHA and AMANDA are dumbfounded.*) I say, how's Billy — blind Billy? Feeling all right?

SID (*venturing forward*). Not very well, Alivia.

ALIVIA. Not well?

SID. No, his eyes hurt.

JERUSHA. He ain't got no eyes!

ALIVIA (*oblivious to JERUSHA*). Too bad. (*Then, looking up*) Did you say something, Jerusha?

JERUSHA. I might o'.

SID. Ya don't have ta go tearin' out somebody's heart every time ya open yer mouth.

JERUSHA (*behind ALIVIA*). Tearin' out somebody's heart! Ya must a-been readin' some to get such expressions! Ya wasn't thinkin' o' hearts six years ago, was ya? Ya wasn't thinkin' about disgracin' us, was ya? Billy ain't got no eyes — it's the curse o' God!

SID. Stop it!

ALIVIA. What is it?

AMANDA. Oh, it's Jerusha and Sid.

ALIVIA. She shouldn't be mean to him when his boy is sick.

JERUSHA. Humph!

ALIVIA. You need some chickens, Sidney?

SID. Well, I —

ALIVIA. You've been working too hard, Sid. Overworked and underfed, that's it. You don't look none too well.

SID. I'm all right.

ALIVIA. Amanda. . . .

AMANDA. Well?

ALIVIA. You go out to the yard and get two or three of my chickens for Sidney.

AMANDA. What?

ALIVIA. Chickens — for Sidney.

JERUSHA. Ya — ya're not goin' ta —

ALIVIA. What is it, Jerusha? Do it for me, Amanda.

JERUSHA. She'll be givin' him her share o' the farm next!

AMANDA (*bitterly to SID*). Of all the schemers!

SID (*breaking*). Gad, Jerusha, be decent ta me!

JERUSHA (*confronting him fiercely*). Stop that swearin' — (*she raises her hand as though to strike him*) — ya —

AMANDA. Come on, Jerusha. Let's get the chickens so's he kin get his sinnin' self from under our roof. (JERUSHA *snorts*. *They exit*. ALIVIA *sits for some time perplexed and thoughtful*.)

SID (*after a prolonged silence*). How're ya feelin', Alivia? (*She looks up; louder*) I say, how ya feelin'?

ALIVIA. Right well, Sidney, right well. The good Lord's not oppressing me any.

SID. That's good. I'm glad.

ALIVIA. Hm-m?

SID. I say I'm glad. It was nice o' ya ta talk kind-like ta me, Livy.

ALIVIA. I guess you've suffered enough for what you've done.

SID. I get so tired of life, sometimes —

ALIVIA. What, Sidney?

SID. I said, I get so tired o' life. (*He coughs.*) If it wouldn't be fer the feelin' that there *was* somethin' better, I don't know what I'd do. But just like now, when I'm feelin' sick an' heavy inside, I still feel there's somethin', somethin' worthwhile an' wonderful just ahead.

ALIVIA. Just ahead — that's the way with life, Sidney.

SID. I ain't got a thing in the world 'ceptin' Marthy 'n' the kids, blind Billy 'n' the rest who kin see. I ain't got nothin' but them an' — an' — (*He coughs.*)

ALIVIA. And what, Sidney?

SID. And a feelin'. (*Visualizing*) It's like diggin' in the gravel with the rest o' the gang.

ALIVIA. In the gravel?

SID. The boss put the idea inta our heads that mebbe if we dug in fur enough we'd find a vein o' gold. He didn't say nothin' but that, an' still we dig — dig. Dig as though mebbe there was gold in there sure enough. There ain't. But still it gives me

that feelin', ya know — the feelin' that mebbe there is gold just because the boss said there was. Ya won't understand.

ALIVIA (*who hasn't heard much of it*). No, Sidney.

SID (*half to himself*). That's the way Marthy 'n' me's been goin' on. Diggin', always diggin'. That's the way we've been livin' an' prayin' ever since — well, ever since we brought old paw an' the rest o' ya to shame. There ain't nothin' to it — there ain't no gold in the pit, but we make believe there is just the same, Marthy an' me. An' all the time — all the time we got it right before us, right before our eyes. . . .

ALIVIA. What are you saying? Got what?

SID. Blind Billy, the curse o' God! (*He coughs.*)

ALIVIA. Blind Billy. . . .

SID. Yeah. God ain't relentin'. It's like Jerusha says, ya reap what ya sow.

ALIVIA. It's not God, Sidney.

SID. Naw, it ain't God — it's the curse o' God.

ALIVIA. It's the devil that does those things. God's good.

SID (*bewildered*). God's stronger than the devil.

ALIVIA. What?

SID. I say, God's stronger than the devil.

ALIVIA. Sure he is.

SID (*quietly*). Well, why does he let the devil do things that ain't good?

ALIVIA. What did you say, Sidney?

SID. Nothin'.

ALIVIA. I've been doing a lot of thinking of late. There comes a time when we've got to think about such things whether we want to or not.

SID. Mm-hm.

ALIVIA. A time when we feel a darkness and a mystery just ahead — when we get to thinking maybe our maws and paws did know something about it — a time when we got to believe that there's a heaven and a — hell. (*JERUSHA returns.*)

JERUSHA. Humph! (*Coming to ALIVIA*) Alivia, d'ya want me ta wheel ya out in the yard? Ya don't want ta stay *here*, do ya?

ALIVIA. I'm all right.

JERUSHA (*hissing to SID*). Ya got yer cheek talkin' ta her.

SID. Don't pester me, Jerusha. I ain't feelin' good.

JERUSHA. I shouldn't think ya would with all that's on yer mind. (*SID looks at her quietly. He coughs and turns his back.*)

ALIVIA. Sid isn't looking any too well.

JERUSHA. Humph!

ALIVIA. You might be kind to him, Jerusha.

JERUSHA (*rebellling*). Ya got yer nerve, Alivia Stewart, askin' that! Ya fergit, I s'pose, that he shamed us out o' society an' all six years back! Just like sendin' us ta jail — an' we innocent, too.

SID. Fergit it, ya old fool.

JERUSHA. Don't ya old fool me or I'll see ya off the place. (*SID is back pouring himself a drink.*)

ALIVIA. He's not well, Jerusha. He coughs something like his paw used to.

JERUSHA. I don't care how he coughs. I made up my mind about him long ago.

ALIVIA. He hasn't had an easy time of it.

JERUSHA. It ain't my fault. Don't be so relentin'!

ALIVIA. He isn't going to live long, Sidney isn't.

JERUSHA. What if he ain't? It'll just go to prove what I've always been sayin' — it'll be the curse just like fell on blind Billy. An' that fool doctor makin' him believe mebbe he kin see! It'll take more'n a doctor ta lift the curse o' God!

SID (*coming down*). God didn't do that!

JERUSHA. Stop talkin' ta me!

SID. God don't send no curses!

JERUSHA. I'll learn ya! (*Unable to control her fury, she strides up and slaps SID a stinging blow across the cheek.*) There, ya — ya dirty sinner!

ALIVIA (*wheeling her chair around*). Jerusha!

SID (*calmly*). Ya shouldn't a-done that, Jerusha.

JERUSHA. It's what I've been wantin' ta do fer six years!
(*She exits.*)

ALIVIA. Jerusha! (SID *goes back to the window where he looks out. He has grown older and weaker in the moment. ALIVIA studies him.*) Sidney.

SID. Yeah?

ALIVIA. I'm sorry, Sidney.

SID. Ya didn't do it, Livy.

ALIVIA. Come on and sit down.

SID. I kin stand. (*Louder*) I kin stand, Livy.

ALIVIA. You mustn't let it matter, Sidney.

SID. It won't. (*Then, abstractedly, to himself*) There's still gold ahead — in the old pit. There's still gold, Marthy. We got ta keep on hopin', ya 'n' me —

ALIVIA. What are you saying, Sidney?

SID. Nothin'. (*He pulls up one of the kitchen chairs and seats himself.*) A man's gotta suffer if he wants ta find gold. . . .

ALIVIA. You aren't well, are you?

SID. It's funny I didn't get mad, ain't it? I should a-knocked her down.

ALIVIA. You're pale and coughing.

SID. When a man's got a family an' mouths ta feed an' doctors ta pay he don't think o' hisself much.

ALIVIA. Doctors?

SID. Naw — doctor. Just a eye-doctor fer Billy. (*He coughs and is much weaker.*)

ALIVIA. Oh.

SID. That's why I'm workin' in the pit, ta pay the doctor. He keeps a cloth 'round Billy's eyes all the time — workin' — a-workin' against the curse. An' mebbe he'll be able ta see! Think o' it, Livy!

JERUSHA (*returning*). Amanda's got a hen fer ya outside.

SID. Thanks, Jerusha. (*He gets up slowly.*)

ALIVIA. You aren't well, Sidney.

SID. I'm all right.

JERUSHA. It's the curse a-workin'! Ya can't get away from it! It'll follow ya indoors an' out, no matter where ya are!

(SID *exits.*) Humph! Actin' up!

ALIVIA. Sidney isn't well.

JERUSHA. I can't understand you, Livy!

ALIVIA. I've been thinking things over lately, Jerusha, and since you hit him I —

JERUSHA. It's what he needed! He had it comin'! Ya kin bet I don't play with sinners like him!

ALIVIA. Mm-hm. We better let him lie down for a while before he starts back to town.

JERUSHA. What! Under our roof!

ALIVIA. He's our half-brother, Jerusha.

JERUSHA. That don't mean nothin' ta me after what he done! (*The telephone rings three short rings which are repeated a few times during their next remarks.*) Who's that?

ALIVIA. What?

JERUSHA. Can't ya hear it?

ALIVIA. Yes, I hear it. Answer it, Jerusha.

JERUSHA (*going to the phone*). Must be from the church. . . . Hello. Who? This is Jerusha Stewart. Yes. Marth — Martha. (*To ALIVIA*) It's her! Sid's wife! Well, what d'ya want? Talk slow, can't ya? I say talk slow! What? What? Ya don't mean he — What? Hello — hello —. (*She puts the receiver back, utterly defeated and absorbed.*)

ALIVIA. What is it, Jerusha? (JERUSHA, *dazed*, comes slowly to Alivia's chair.) What is it?

JERUSHA. He — he kin see.

ALIVIA. What?

JERUSHA. Blind Billy kin see!

ALIVIA. He can see? Thank God! You must tell Sid! Get him, Jerusha! Get Sidney.

JERUSHA (*bitterly*). Blind Billy kin see.

ALIVIA. Get Sidney.

JERUSHA (*undone as SID and AMANDA are heard entering the porch*). They — they're comin' — I'll tell him. Yeh, I'll tell him.

ALIVIA. Sid — Sidney —

SID (*from outside*). Yes, Livy?

ALIVIA. Sidney! Come in! (*Suddenly there is the sound of a person falling, accompanied by Amanda's scream. JERUSHA straightens, her eyes blazing. There is a moment of tense silence.*)

JERUSHA (*quietly, in a bated, triumphant whisper*). Some-thin's happened!

ALIVIA (*awed*). What?

JERUSHA. Sid's fell!

ALIVIA. Jerusha! Sidney! Blind Billy kin see!

JERUSHA. Shut up, Livy!

AMANDA (*entering; stoically*). Sid's fell on the porch.

ALIVIA. What is it?

AMANDA. Sid's fell.

JERUSHA. Amanda, is — is he —

AMANDA (*grimly*). He's dead. (*She turns a cold, victorious eye to JERUSHA.*)

ALIVIA (*transfixed, wheeling her chair slowly toward the door*). Not — not dead?

JERUSHA (*sovereignly*). The curse o' God! (*But as she slowly turns to the door she is qualmish; but only for the moment, as she says profoundly*) Under our roof? (*This time AMANDA snorts quietly, rewarded by a look of dismay from JERUSHA, while the curtain falls.*)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Meditation" *Klein*

CALL TO WORSHIP

And it came to pass, that, while they communed together
and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

HYMN: "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" *Whittier*

RESPONSIVE READING

Leader: Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least
of these, my brethren, saith the Master, ye have done it
unto me.

Congregation: Help us, O Father, that we may recognize
thy children.

Leader: Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,
shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who doeth
the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Congregation: Teach us to discern, O God, the things of
thy kingdom; save us from the deceptions of self-will.

Leader: Pure religion and undefiled before God and the
Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their
affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Congregation: O God, our Father, may we share of thy
Spirit and thus be brought nigh unto thee.

Leader: Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that
men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this
is the law and the prophets.

Congregation: Teach us thy will, O Lord.

In unison:

Some word of hope, for hearts
Burdened with fears,

Some balm of peace, for eyes
 Blinded with tears,
 Some dews of mercy shed,
 Some wayward footsteps led,
 Dear Lord to thee.

— *Edwin P. Parker*

HYMN: "Master, no Offering, Costly and Sweet" *Parker*

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Rom. 12

OFFERTORY: "God so Loved the World" *Shawker*

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Help us, our Father, to understand that the offerings most acceptable to thee are those of humility and brotherhood. Consecrate these gifts to the larger offering intended. In Jesus' name. Amen.

PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, accept our lives as thou didst accept the gifts we placed on the altar. The gifts are symbolic of the larger sacrifice. Help us that we may live day by day so that our living may reflect thy Spirit in the world. Make us kind and tolerant in our attitude toward others. May we seek to find the lovely among the unlovely, to bring character from darkness and to reveal by our trust and confidence that we believe that thy Spirit is in human-kind. When men sin, keep us from casting stones. Instead may we seek to redeem them from their sin. While it is difficult for us to approach Christlikeness, help us, in so far as we are able, to lift rather than to cast down, to help rather than to condemn. May we never think of the curse that comes from human meanness as the curse of God, or of the faltering of human hearts as the withdrawal of thy hand. Amen.

HYMN: "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" *F. W. Faber*

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

BENEDICTION

Now unto the God who smiles upon mankind, believing that eventually each will find his relation to the Eternal, be our tribute of love and devotion forever. Amen.

ORGAN POSTLUDE: "Sanctus" *Gounod*

MOTHER OWEN
KEEPS CHRISTMAS

CHARACTERS

MOTHER OWEN, *an invalid, about seventy*

JOHN OWEN, *her son, fifty*

MARY, *her attendant, seventeen*

GORDON, *Mary's suitor*

A BOY

A GIRL

Scene: A room in a modest house.

Time: A Christmas Eve, the present.

A room in the modest home of Mother Owen. Friendly windows look out on a Christmas-Eve landscape, and a door at right opens to Mother Owen's world. At left is a doorway communicating with other parts of the house. The furniture in the room is chiefly old, well worn pieces, all brightened now by a carefully decorated Christmas tree of modest size, with a number of wrapped gifts piled at its base.



MOTHER OWEN KEEPS CHRISTMAS

As the play opens, MOTHER OWEN is being brought into the room in a wheel chair. Tonight, as always, she is the personification of good will and cheer, a woman of simple and beautiful faith, mellow and wise with the wisdom of seventy years. Her attendant is a girl of seventeen, MARY. MARY places the chair so that MOTHER OWEN can look out into the night.

MARY. There, Mother Owen. (*She adjusts the coverlet on Mother Owen's lap.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Thank you, Mary.

MARY (*happily; looking outside*). It's a pretty night, isn't it?

MOTHER OWEN (*with tender emotion*). Christmas Eve. . . .

MARY (*in a happy mood*). Yes, Mother Owen. (*She busies herself about the room; adjusts a floor lamp so that its light will fall over Mother Owen's shoulders. Occasionally she sends an expectant glance out of the window.*)

MOTHER OWEN (*half to herself, chuckling*). To think I have all my shopping finished already. . . . Took me seventy years to learn that, but I got there. I reckon half the folks tonight are still so busy at the stores they ain't got time to think where Christmas got its name. (MARY, *trying to hide her impatience, wanting something to do, arranges things, looks around.*)

MARY. Now, let's see, where are your glasses?

MOTHER OWEN (*looking at MARY whose back is turned to her*). What's that?

MARY (*searching*). I wanted to find your glasses before I left. You'll want to read and — (*She turns, looks at MOTHER*

OWEN, *realizes that the latter is wearing the glasses.*) Oh, of course, you have them on! How silly of me! (*She comes over gaily.*) Let me clean them for you. (*She takes the glasses.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Well, I used to be that jittery, too, on Christmas Eve, waiting for my young man to take me to the service.

MARY (*cleaning the glasses vigorously*). Were you really?

MOTHER OWEN (*in playful offense*). Well, now, certainly I was. He used to drive up with his horse and cutter looking for all the world like one of them there Currier and Ives prints we used to have. (*MARY listens attentively; MOTHER OWEN continues, visualizing*) Always had the finest horse in Grigson, George did, and the cutter trimmed in red stripes with a yellow ornament of a harp and a cupid on the dash. And the whip was black with yellow and red circles running every which way around the handle. There were bells on the horse, too, and the way they tinkled on a crisp night you'd a-thought sure it was the angels' orchestra. Too bad you youngsters was born so late.

MARY (*with a quiet laugh*). Why, Mother Owen?

MOTHER OWEN. Not to know what it is to feel a blooded horse pull you through the fields — with the snow blowing through your hair — and the wind biting at your cheeks — making new trails that nobody had cut out for you before. Shucks! You never even heard the crickling steel of a cutter on a frosty night!

MARY (*putting the glasses back on MOTHER OWEN*). Oh, now, you'd have loved to have Mr. Owen drive up with a nice closed car, a heater turned on full blast.

MOTHER OWEN. A right good way to take cold, too! (*She chuckles, takes Mary's hand.*) Of course I would, child.

MARY. Anyway, Gordon and I are going to walk to the service tonight.

MOTHER OWEN. Real pioneers. . . . (*Then, in eager confidence*) But tell me, Mary, have you got his gift all wrapped up?

MARY (*turning to the packages under the tree*). Yes, I — Oh, I hope he'll like it!

MOTHER OWEN. If he doesn't he ought to be spanked.

MARY. But I know he'd have liked a wrist watch. And I'm giving him a scarf.

MOTHER OWEN. It'll keep him from getting sore throat. That's worth a heap more than knowing the time of day.

MARY. Do you suppose he'll like the color? Those red and yellow pin stripes. . . . (*She comes to Mother Owen's chair.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Didn't I just get through telling you that's what George had the cutter painted with? Menfolks don't change such a tolerable lot in half a century. (*She takes the package; reads*) "To Gordon, from Mary." (*She smiles.*) I've always thought it right pretty that our names was alike, yours and mine. You don't mind, do you?

MARY. Oh, Mother Owen.

MOTHER OWEN. It wouldn't do you much good if you did. . . . Well, I didn't make much out of my name, I guess. Here I sit a-Christmas Eve with nary a place to go. Just a botheration to you and John — the one son I've got left. (*With a mischievous note*) Do you know what I told Reverend Smith once? I said, the good Lord can't have more than two ideas in mind for keeping me here. The one is so's I can go on paying taxes and the other is to brighten the corner where I've got to be. I can't for the life of me see nothing but that.

MARY. I can. I heard Reverend Smith say that the ministry you carried on from your chair often made him ashamed of himself. (MOTHER OWEN *lifts a hand in quiet remonstrance.*) Yes, he did.

MOTHER OWEN. Beats all how these young preachers are beginning to stretch the truth.

MARY. But it's true! You've always been so patient and good to everyone. Everybody in Grigson says that. You've been good enough to me to be my real mother. (*A church bell*

rings in the distance.) There! Do you hear? I do wonder where Gordon —

MOTHER OWEN (*looking out*). There he comes. Look at him — proud as a peacock! (*MARY is returning the package to its place.*) Get the package hid good! Don't let him get a hand on it!

MARY (*dropping the package*). Oh, my gracious! (*She picks it up and replaces it.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Run to the door, child. (*There is a knock at the door.*)

MARY. I will! (*She goes.*)

MOTHER OWEN (*while MARY is offstage*). And some folks say love is old stuff to these young'uns. Old stuff, shucks! (*MARY and GORDON are heard exchanging greetings.*)

MARY. — thought you were never coming.

GORDON. — had to help dad start the car. (*They come in.*) Merry Christmas, Mother Owen.

MOTHER OWEN. Merry Christmas, Gordon. (*They shake hands.*)

MARY. I'll get my things. (*She goes.*)

GORDON (*talking until MARY is out of sight*). Awfully sorry to come so late, but we — (*Then, confidentially*) Mother Owen, I've got Mary's present and I want you to keep it for me. Want it to be a real surprise. Here. (*He has taken a small box from his pocket.*) If she sees the size of it she'll guess it first thing.

MOTHER OWEN (*slightly disturbed*). You don't mean it's a . . . ?

GORDON. What?

MOTHER OWEN. A ring?

GORDON (*laughing*). Now, Mother Owen.

MOTHER OWEN. Well, I. . . . (*She has taken the package.*)

GORDON. No, they're earrings!

MOTHER OWEN. Oh, earrings. . . .

GORDON. And you ought to see how clever I was when I got

her to pick them out! She doesn't know a thing about — (*MARY returns quickly; he catches himself*) Yes, seems there're always more chores on Christmas Eve. I remember —

MARY. Let's go!

GORDON. Well, good-by, Mother Owen! (*He winks at her. MOTHER OWEN has put the box in her dress pocket under the coverlet.*)

MARY. Good-by, Mother Owen. John should be back any moment. Hate to leave you alone!

MOTHER OWEN. I'll be right here when you get back. And . . . here, Mary. (*She reaches into her pocket; GORDON watches, puzzled.*)

MARY (*glancing from one to the other*). What are you hiding?

MOTHER OWEN. I just want to give you this. (*She hands MARY a dollar bill.*) You put this dollar in the collection for me. (*GORDON is relieved. He has gone over to the tree, looks at the gifts.*)

MARY. Surely.

GORDON (*picking up his package*). Say, is this mine?

MARY. Gordon! (*She takes it from him.*)

GORDON. One guess is all I need for that, Mother Owen.

MOTHER OWEN. Don't be too sure.

MARY. You haven't any idea! (*While MARY is replacing the package GORDON whispers something to MOTHER OWEN. MARY sees him.*)

MARY. Does he know, Mother Owen?

MOTHER OWEN. He's way off.

GORDON. We'll see.

MARY. But if he knows it —

GORDON (*taking her arm*). Oh, come along!

MARY (*over her shoulder*). Goodnight, Mother Owen.

(*They go. MOTHER OWEN draws herself nearer to the window, watches them. Then she takes out the box containing the*

earrings, looks at it, shakes it and returns it to her pocket. After a moment JOHN OWEN enters. He is a man of the soil, honest, considerate of his mother. He is in his fifties, a widower. He carries a market basket filled with groceries.)

JOHN (*as he enters*). Here comes the grocery-man, mother.

MOTHER OWEN. You've got it all fixed up, have you, John?

JOHN (*bringing the basket to her chair*). All I could get in. Looks right nice, don't it?

MOTHER OWEN (*adjusting the articles*). Sugar — coffee — oranges —

JOHN. Eggs. I took the chicken to the Petersons —

MOTHER OWEN (*eagerly*). Were they glad to get it?

JOHN. They didn't refuse it.

MOTHER OWEN (*spying something in the basket*). And you did put in the pitcher, didn't you? (*She holds up a beautiful little old glass creamer.*)

JOHN. Well, I know how fighting mad you were when I —

MOTHER OWEN. The Talbots will appreciate it, John. Just like the Petersons appreciated the chicken and just like the Mareks will thank you for the groceries.

JOHN. I still don't know whether you'd ought to be giving away all those antiques.

MOTHER OWEN (*disparagingly*). Antiques! You wouldn't call me an antique, would you?

JOHN (*smiling*). Well, I don't know —

MOTHER OWEN (*giving him an amused glance*). And this pitcher don't beat me by more than twenty years. No, John — who knows whether I'll see another Christmas Eve —

JOHN. Now, mother. . . . (*He takes the pitcher from her, takes the basket to a chair where he sets it down.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Oh, I don't want to be sentimental — but a little sentiment ain't never hurt nobody much, either. No — it's just a matter of putting my house in order, that's what it is. The things people have given to me I just give back to them.

Well now, there's no cheaper way to keep Christmas than that. There's that pitcher. A cousin of the Talbots gave that to me once. Now Mrs. Talbot has gone off on this antique business so I give it to her. Just kept it for her these years. And John —

JOHN. Yes, mother?

MOTHER OWEN. Here's Gordon's present to Mary. Take me over to the tree so's I can give it a good displaying for when she comes back.

JOHN (*coming to her chair; playfully*). When are you going to stop playing around with those young'uns, mother? (*He starts wheeling her over.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Earrings. Ain't it strange, that's what your father gave me one time. Wonder when times is ever goin' to change. There, I'll put it right here beside hers to him. Look at this — wrapped up like it was something that might explode any minute. (*She examines Mary's package which contains the scarf.*)

JOHN (*reading over her shoulder*). "To Gordon, from Mary." That's the scarf she got for him.

MOTHER OWEN (*looking quietly at the package*). John, how many watches have you got?

JOHN. Watches? Why, just one.

MOTHER OWEN (*replacing the package*). Now, that's a-plenty, ain't it?

JOHN. I hope you weren't figuring on getting me a —

MOTHER OWEN. No, no, but the watch I gave your father once 'fore we was married is there in that table drawer. Let's go and look at it.

JOHN (*wheeling her over*). What are you aiming to do now?

MOTHER OWEN. You s'pose Mary's Gordon'd like that?

JOHN (*opening the drawer for her*). I haven't seen that — What? Gordon? I'll say he wouldn't! Fellows don't wear big watches like that any more, mother.

MOTHER OWEN. That's what I thought. (*He hands her the*

watch.) That's what I thought. Nobody'd want that, not even you — would you, John?

JOHN. Of course, from the sentimental side —

MOTHER OWEN. Sentimental side, shucks! No, there's just one person'd give a thing for this and that's Dave Carson. Yes, sir. Dave has wanted that watch more than once. He's got a hankerin' for picking up old timepieces. John. . . . (*She looks at him with a quiet smile.*) You know what I want, don't you, John? Stop at the jewelry store on your way round with that basket and trade this off to Dave for a wrist watch.

JOHN. A wrist watch?

MOTHER OWEN (*studying the watch in her hands*). Now, I could say that I remembered the Christmas Eve I gave him this and that it was a night like tonight. . . . But it wasn't really. It was like spring that Christmas. There wasn't a mite of snow. And George said it felt more like the Fourth of July. When we came back from the church program that night we all went outside and we had the tree out in the yard. We wouldn't even have needed the candles far as light was concerned, on account of the way the moon came through the trees that night.

JOHN. Were you and father engaged then already?

MOTHER OWEN. Well, we was after that. Guess my giving him the watch didn't interfere with that none. (*She has been winding the stem of the watch and now holds it to her ear.*)

JOHN. Don't tell me it still runs!

MOTHER OWEN (*chuckling*). Just needed a little encouragement. Now, John, you do some running, too. We'll want the wrist watch wrapped in the package before the children get back.

JOHN. But what is Gordon going to say — and Mary? It's not as if they were your children.

MOTHER OWEN (*giving him the watch*). You just let your old mother keep Christmas in her own way, John Owen. (*Half to herself*) Anyway, if I get a kick out of it. . . .

JOHN (*wheeling her back to the window*). What's that you

say? Kick out of it? I'm afraid you'll never grow up, mother. There. Will you be all right for a while?

MOTHER OWEN. I won't as much as get out of my chair. (*He adjusts the coverlet.*) Thank you, John. Now you might give me the good Book and my reading board and I'll be no more botheration.

JOHN (*putting a board across her chair on which he lays the open Bible*). I've got to get all this straight now. The groceries to the Marek family down near the tracks — the pitcher to the Talbots — exchange the watch for a wrist watch. (*He studies her quizzically.*) It's harder for you to give up that watch than you'll —

MOTHER OWEN. Hard nothing! There it was a-lying for fourteen years since your father was called away. Why, it was just waiting for a Christmas Eve like this. Anyway, imagine anybody carrying something like that in a vest pocket.

JOHN (*with a sigh*). I stopped long ago trying to figure you out. If the world was full of people like you everybody'd be giving things away until nobody'd know whose was which. (*MOTHER OWEN turns some leaves in her Bible; JOHN puts on his coat.*) If you'd only do this on Christmas — but you've got the notion Christmas lasts from one December to the next. (*After a moment, in deep sincerity*) You've got a way with you, though, that's always made me understand God just a little better. (*He comes to her, presses her hand.*)

MOTHER OWEN. John. . . . Be off with you now. And don't be getting into any mischief.

JOHN. I'll be right back.

MOTHER OWEN. You might turn out the other lights, John. Just leave this one for me. (*He turns out the other lights in the room, leaving her under the light of the floor lamp, then exits. MOTHER OWEN begins to read to herself.*) "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And suddenly the angel of the Lord

appeared unto them, saying, Be not afraid: behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. . . . For unto you is born in the city of Bethlehem a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. . . ." (*Her voice dies away and she falls asleep.*)

(*During the above the light has dimmed perceptibly, leaving the room in semi-darkness for a moment. Then a dim light — as if it were moonlight — falls over the center of the room. It is very quiet. An organ is heard playing "O Little Town of Bethlehem" for a while. Then, from outside, comes a soft sound of sleigh bells and laughter. A BOY and a GIRL in their late teens enter. The girl wears a coat and gown of the fashion of about sixty years ago.*)

This interlude has the atmosphere of a dream picture. Articles and persons referred to are not actually visible.)

THE GIRL. Wasn't it fun to give out those sacks!

THE BOY (*helping her with her coat*). And as usual you gave yours away.

THE GIRL. To old Grayson. I just know he hasn't any teeth to bite those gumdrops!

THE BOY (*laughing*). What about the walnuts?

THE GIRL. Don't you like the tree?

THE BOY. It's a beauty. When do we light the candles?

THE GIRL. We can do that now! Would you like to? I'll get some fire from the kitchen.

THE BOY. I've got an idea.

THE GIRL. What?

THE BOY. Let's take the tree out in the yard!

THE GIRL. Let's do! It's warm enough, isn't it?

THE BOY. More like the Fourth of July than Christmas, far as the weather goes. First time I ever put sleigh bells on the buggy!

THE GIRL. You take it out. Do you think you can?

THE BOY (*pantomiming*). Easy as can be! Watch!

THE GIRL. You'll get needles all over you! I'll bring the presents. Oh, be careful of the door!

THE BOY. Let's light it before your parents come from the service. (*He has moved into the shadows.*)

THE GIRL (*as if attending to gifts; singing softly*).

“O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by. . . .”

THE BOY. What do you suppose you're going to get?

THE GIRL. From — ?

THE BOY. Me. You don't ever ask. I believe you'd rather give presents than get them. Did you give everybody in your class something?

THE GIRL. Isn't it a strange Christmas? There's not a mite of snow.

THE BOY. What would you like better than anything else?

THE GIRL. Don't make me guess!

THE BOY. Here it is. (*He pantomimes as if holding out a gift.*)

THE GIRL. I can't open it now.

THE BOY. Why not?

THE GIRL. We never open the packages till everybody is back from the service.

THE BOY. But everybody is here. And the tree is lit.

THE GIRL. Of course! I'm such a botheration.

THE BOY. Open it.

THE GIRL (*as if to someone near her*). Shall I, mother? (*To the BOY*) And here is yours! (*As though giving him a package.*)

THE BOY. It's a bigger package than mine. Not much, though.

THE GIRL. You first!

THE BOY. Let's open them together.

THE GIRL. I'm so upset! You don't mean they are earrings!

THE BOY. Like them? You wouldn't have guessed it, would you? Remember the day we were with young Dave Carson in his father's store? You said you liked them!

THE GIRL. I never thought I'd get them! Don't they — Look, mother! Father, don't you think they're lovely!

THE BOY (*quietly*). Mary!

THE GIRL (*laughing*). Are you surprised?

THE BOY. But — that's an awfully wonderful present — a watch like this!

THE GIRL. Is it running?

THE BOY. Sure, it's running. Look! You can tell the time out here in the moonlight! Don't know how I'll ever thank you!

THE GIRL. Just think of me sometimes . . . when you look at it, won't you?

THE BOY. Sure.

THE GIRL. Guess we can be a little sentimental — a-Christmas Eve. That's the way mother always kept Christmas. Isn't it, mother?

(*The lights slowly dim. For a moment it is dark and quiet. An organ plays "O Little Town of Bethlehem." When Mother Owen's lamp is lit again she is still asleep in her chair. The BOY and the GIRL are gone and the scene is as before. After a moment JOHN OWEN enters from right.*)

JOHN. Well, mother, I've made the rounds in real Santa Claus fashion. (*He takes off his coat.*) Put the basket on the steps of Mareks' house 'cause I knew you didn't want them to — (*He notices that his mother does not move.*) Mother — (*He comes over to her, shakes her gently. MOTHER OWEN comes slowly out of her sleep, looks at him.*) Sleeping?

MOTHER OWEN (*nodding slowly*). Think of it. Sit here reading the good Book and just fall asleep. . . . Well, that just means you'll have to read two chapters to me later. I never do sleep when you read, John.

JOHN. Now, you just don't worry about that — (*relieving her of the board and the Bible.*)

MOTHER OWEN (*eagerly*). Did you get it?

JOHN (*taking a package from his pocket*). After walking around the block three times, debating with myself. Yes, I got it. And as glad as old Dave was to get the watch I wonder if we hadn't ought to —

MOTHER OWEN (*taking the package*). All wrapped up in that new-fangled paper!

JOHN. It's a beautiful watch.

MOTHER OWEN. We'll just put it inside her package like this. It must look as though it came from her. Get me over there, John. (*She chuckles as JOHN moves her over to the table.*)

JOHN. I think the service is just about over, too.

MOTHER OWEN (*handing him the package with the scarf*). Here, you undo it. And remember how it was tied.

JOHN. You know, I wonder if this won't be embarrassing for the girl though.

MOTHER OWEN. What do you mean, John?

JOHN. Won't she maybe think that her scarf is put in the shade with a present like this — feel like maybe hers wasn't enough?

MOTHER OWEN (*solemnly*). Now, I never looked at it that way. Just rushed in with an idee —

JOHN. And won't Gordon think she's spending an awful lot?

MOTHER OWEN. Well, now — But I owe it to the girl, John — letting any sentiment out of the picture for the time. It ain't many young folks'd bother with an old creation like me. And what we've been able to pay her ain't going to make her rich. I just thought it'd be a grand surprise seeing we ain't got no one else to be playing tricks like this on. . . .

JOHN (*ready to open the package*). Well, what do you think?

MOTHER OWEN. Land! I don't know. Maybe we'd ought to take it back and —

JOHN. Now, here! I wasn't aiming to get you to thinking like that. I guess Mary will get as much of a surprise out of it as Gordon.

MOTHER OWEN. But maybe a girl shouldn't be giving presents like that these days.

JOHN. I'm going to do it! (*He starts to untie the package.*)

MOTHER OWEN. John, I don't know —

JOHN. Anyway I'm not keen about walking around the block three times again — this time exchanging it *back*! If this is the way you want to keep Christmas, this is the way you're going to keep it. I never did hear about Santa Claus ever making any very bad mistakes. There, now we'll lay the watch right on top. . . . (*Business with package.*)

MOTHER OWEN. If there was ever a jack-in-the-box this is one! You think you can get it back the way it was so there won't be no suspecting before things ever get started?

JOHN. I guess what I was trying to say all along was that I didn't want to be doing anything that might break up the friendship between them.

MOTHER OWEN. Break it up! (*She chuckles.*) I've got a feeling it might go just the other way. And that's what I worry about. Oh, I know it ain't right and I know these young'uns go the way of all the rest of us, but tonight when he gave me that box of his and I thought it was a ring — I got such a catch in my throat I must a-let on what I was thinking sure enough. Now here I am maybe urging along just what I was afraid of having happen!

JOHN (*having wrapped the package*). There, could you ever tell there's been a mouse in this?

MOTHER OWEN. "To Gordon, from Mary." (*Noise at door.*) Lands! There they are!

(JOHN *starts bringing* MOTHER OWEN *back to the window.* MARY *and* GORDON *come in.* MARY *has a flowering plant wrapped in paper.*)

GORDON. Merry Christmas, Mr. Owen!

JOHN. Merry Christmas, Gordon!

MARY. Look, Mother Owen, Reverend Smith sent this. He said he'd come to see you tomorrow.

(The following conversation is largely simultaneous.)

MOTHER OWEN. Well, well.

GORDON. We had a fine program, Mr. Owen.

JOHN. That's right, put your things there, Gordon.

MARY (*unwrapping the plant for MOTHER OWEN*). This was on the pulpit through the program. Isn't it nice?

MOTHER OWEN. People are too good to me.

JOHN (*to GORDON*). Big crowd there, I imagine.

GORDON. Church was packed. (*He approaches the pile of gifts.*) Mr. Owen — (*He draws JOHN near the tree, shows him the gift for MARY.*)

JOHN. I see. And what do you suppose you'll get from her?

GORDON. I've got an idea. (*He pantomimes to indicate a scarf.*)

MARY (*setting the plant on a table*). And everybody sends Merry Christmas to you, Mother Owen.

MOTHER OWEN (*looking at the plant*). Isn't it pretty!

MARY. What did you do all evening?

JOHN. Oh, we just sat around. Not a very exciting evening, was it, mother?

MOTHER OWEN (*chuckling*). It all depends — how you look at it, I mean.

GORDON. Well, if I remember correctly this should be the time for the presents. (*He takes the package containing the earrings*) To Mary, from Gordon!

MARY. Oh, shouldn't we wait?

GORDON. Why?

MOTHER OWEN. John — (*She makes a sign suggesting that they leave in order that GORDON and MARY may be alone.*)

MARY. I should say not. You're staying!

GORDON. Of course you are! Here, Mother Owen, this is for you. And this is for you, Mr. Owen. (*Business of giving out packages.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Now, what do you mean, getting something for me?

MARY. This is yours, Gordon! (*Ad lib. Thank you! throughout.*) Mother Owen! Mr. Owen! (*Gives them packages.*)

GORDON (*shaking his package*). I wonder what it is. It rattles, or does it?

JOHN. And this is from the two of us, Gordon. And this is for you, Mary. You'll have to overlook the way it's wrapped — I never was much for doing things up.

GORDON. That's one thing Mary can do. Look at this — a perfect job. Who's going to open first?

MARY. You.

GORDON. I think Mother Owen should.

MARY. Of course!

MOTHER OWEN. Now, we'll let Mary.

GORDON. Open it.

MARY. You first, Gordon.

GORDON. All right, let's open them together.

(*From this point on, through the following conversation between GORDON and MARY, the same mood prevails as in the fantasy. JOHN OWEN has stepped into the shadow and MOTHER OWEN watches as if in remembrance.*)

MARY (*opening the box*). I'm so upset! You don't mean they are — Earrings!

GORDON. Like them? You wouldn't have guessed it, would you? Remember the day we were at Carson's store? You said you liked them!

MARY. I never thought they'd ever be mine! Don't they — Look, Mother Owen! Aren't they lovely!

GORDON (*having opened his box*). A scarf! And a beauty. (*He takes it out, puts it around him.*)

MARY. Are you surprised?

GORDON. I had an idea, but — What's this? Another present?

MARY. I — (*She is bewildered.*)

GORDON. What's the idea of — (*He has unwrapped it; stares at the wrist watch; says quietly like the Boy in the fantasy*) Mary!

MARY. But — Mother Owen. . . . (*She turns to MOTHER OWEN who pantomimes an explanation to her.*)

GORDON. But — that's an awfully wonderful present — a watch like this! Oh, that's swell! Look, Mr. Owen!

MARY. Let me see it, too!

GORDON. You shouldn't have given me anything like this — two presents! (*MARY looks at the watch, holds back her tears.*) Why did you do it, Mary?

MARY. I — I guess we can be a little sentimental on Christmas Eve! That's the way Mother Owen always kept Christmas. Isn't it, Mother Owen? (*She comes to Mother Owen's chair, kneels beside it and buries her head in the old woman's lap, crying softly.*)

MOTHER OWEN. Yes, child. And I guess it's a good way, too. The two fit together tolerable well, I think — the real meaning of Christmas and the giving of things from one to the other.

GORDON. I certainly thank you, Mary.

MARY (*looking up*). You're awfully welcome.

GORDON. Here, Mr. Owen, help me get it on. (*Business with watch.*)

MOTHER OWEN (*aside to MARY*). You don't care, Mary?

MARY. Oh, no! But you shouldn't have.

MOTHER OWEN. Now you just straighten up. . . . It'll be our secret. I guess menfolks don't know the half that goes into some gifts and that don't hurt them none either.

GORDON (*coming over to them*). There — (*He shows the watch to MARY.*) I believe you'd rather give presents than get them.

MARY. Oh, no, I wouldn't really!

MOTHER OWEN. But wait, now we've got to open ours, John and I. And we'll have a bite for you two after that. (*She begins to open one of her packages; her voice trembles*) I don't know . . . there's something about Christmas . . . never could understand it.

MARY. Listen, Mother Owen!

(*In the distance carolers are heard singing "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The music comes nearer steadily and MARY moves Mother Owen's chair closer to the window.*)

MARY. They're from the church.

MOTHER OWEN. Now ain't that nice! Do you think they're doing that just for me? (*The singing is very near — almost just outside the window.*) Sometimes I think the people in the world are awfully good. . . .

(*As the song reaches its crescendo and the carolers gather at the window, the curtain is slowly drawn.*)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "The March of the Magi" *Dubois*

OPENING SENTENCES

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

HYMN: "O Come all ye Faithful" *Oakeley*

RESPONSIVE READING

Leader:

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

Congregation: And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Leader:

For Christ is born of Mary;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.

Congregation: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son
is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders;
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the
mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Leader:

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend on us we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel.

Congregation: And he shall not judge after the sight of
his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears;
but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and re-
prove with equity the meek of the earth; and righteous-
ness shall be the girdle of his waist and faithfulness the
girdle of his loins.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

PRAYER

Almighty God, who hast revealed the glory of thy love
in the face of Jesus Christ, and hast called us by him to live
with thee as children: Let the Day-spring from on high
visit us, and the Day-star arise in our hearts. May the

spirit of Jesus be born in us anew, teaching our love to remember, our anger to forgive, our unkindness to forget; that something of his beauty may be upon us, and that his grace may be shed abroad in our hearts. Make us compassionate one toward another, merciful, tenderhearted, forgiving one another; even as thou, O God, art compassionate toward us, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; for the sake of thy dear Son, our Saviour. Amen.

— *Service Book and Ordinal of the
Presbyterian Church of South Africa*

OFFERTORY SOLO: "He shall Feed his Flock" *Handel*

HYMN: "Luther's Cradle Hymn"

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

POSTLUDE: "Hallelujah Chorus" *Handel*

BENEDICTION, *to be pronounced during an organ postlude:*

And now may the Spirit of the Father of us all, incarnated in the Babe of Bethlehem, cleanse your hearts and bring you great joy of Christian hope. Amen.

DAYS TO COME

CHARACTERS

FIRST FIGURE

SECOND FIGURE

THE MOTHER

THE YOUTH

THE VISITOR

Scene: A church chancel.

Time: The present.

The setting for this drama is the church chancel itself. Perhaps no changes will be necessary other than a rearrangement of the chancel furnishings to allow proper playing space. The keynote of the scene is simplicity. The light is subdued. A musical background, very soft, will enhance the presentation.



DAYS TO COME

The play opens with two FIGURES robed in black standing on either side of an altar, on which are many burning candles. These are snuffed out by the FIGURES during their speeches prior to the entrance of the MOTHER and the YOUTH. When these enter, just one candle should remain lighted.

The FIGURES speak after the manner of a recitative.

FIRST FIGURE. There is no blind terror these days driving man to religion. There is no central theme making man pledge allegiance to God. For the first time in history no compulsion of any kind forces man to seek the Infinite.

SECOND FIGURE. For the first time in history man is invited, not compelled, to partake of spiritual truths. But man heeds no invitation. He is too engrossed in the world for spiritual reflection.

FIRST FIGURE. He retains a form of religion, but cares little about religion's content or essentials. Darkness is come upon him, but he is content.

SECOND FIGURE. Chaos and corruption, world depressions, strife, war, and death do not shake him from his lethargy.

FIRST FIGURE. So many creeds, so many faiths, men go from doubt to disbelief.

SECOND FIGURE. Where are the seekers, they who hunt adventure and experience in the ways of God?

FIRST FIGURE. Where are the guards of faith whose voices spoke through martyrdom? They are unchampioned, desolate.

SECOND FIGURE. Why do they say, "Keep candles lighted"? Here is the temple, but where are men to cast their souls upon the throne?

FIRST FIGURE. Indifference moves across the land. Lament all you who fan religion's flame.

FIRST *and* SECOND FIGURES. We are the thoughts widespread in Christendom.

FIRST FIGURE. Does the old God still live who quickened men and asked response from those who defended his name?

SECOND FIGURE. Is it only counted folly that men gave their lives for a belief? Faith's deep cathedral rock — has it decayed, that people no longer kneel in prayer?

FIRST FIGURE. Can life endure if it has lost relation to the Infinite?

SECOND FIGURE. Can nations stand where God has been destroyed?

FIRST FIGURE. A lonely world without Him.

SECOND FIGURE. A barren world.

FIRST FIGURE. A godless world. Forgotten are the altars of the Lord where once men prayed.

SECOND FIGURE. Wait! I felt a rush of air, cool from without. The candle flickered and now burns brighter.

FIRST FIGURE. Someone has entered. Who comes into the chapel at this hour?

SECOND FIGURE. It is a woman and a youth. They approach.

(*The MOTHER, a woman of middle age, has entered. At her side is a YOUTH of fifteen.*)

THE MOTHER. This is the chapel, my son, where men have always come to find life and light and courage. It is God's house, built and dedicated to him. Will you remember that?

THE YOUTH. Yes.

THE MOTHER. Many years ago, when the Master was a boy, he went to church. It was his Father's house, he said. This is your Father's house. Its people may not always live uprightly, there may be things here to make you doubtful and perplexed, but the church will be what you make it. It will be as great as your greatest dream or as small as your smallest thought.

THE YOUTH. Yes, mother. Tell me, what are those figures standing there beside the altar?

THE MOTHER. Figures? I see nothing.

THE YOUTH. They are dark and tall. They stand motionless.

THE MOTHER. Some say they have seen visions. . . . I come here daily and light the candles on the altar ; when I return they have been snuffed out. What do you see?

THE YOUTH. Listen!

FIRST FIGURE. What of the churches' youth? What will they answer when the world says, "Show us your God"?

SECOND FIGURE. They, too, have wandered far afield and find belief of little use.

THE MOTHER. What do you hear?

THE YOUTH. I heard the figures speak and one said, "What of the youth? What will they answer when the world says, 'Show us your God'?"

THE MOTHER. Perhaps these are merely thoughts making themselves articulate. You will hear them always. . . . Show us your God? Well, let that be your task! Rebuild the altars of your fathers and bring back the glory that belonged to Christendom!

THE YOUTH. Men have suffered, haven't they? to bring us our faith.

THE MOTHER (*relighting some of the candles*). And men have died for it. Still some do not think religion challenging. Some do not think it adventurous. Some feel it has no vigor. But it is the most powerful thing in life. And you will be the one to bring it back to men!

THE YOUTH. Then I must prepare myself. I must come here often and listen to these figures. I must learn what we need. I must be reminded of what men have lost.

THE MOTHER. The life beautiful has been lost. But it is here, it will remake the world, and bring back brotherhood and peace.

FIRST FIGURE. What of the cynicism into which the world is

plunged? What of the great wave of indifference toward church and creed? Can men still rise above all that? Can youth do anything in this great tragedy?

THE YOUTH. Yes!

THE MOTHER. Why do you say that?

THE YOUTH. I heard the figure ask if youth could bring men out of their indifference. If only every mother would bring her son here to this altar that he could hear the challenge!

THE MOTHER. And if every son would come back to rebuild the altars where his father worshiped. How quickly the world would be transformed!

THE YOUTH. How should I begin?

THE MOTHER. First, by believing. Believe that true religion leads to the highest good. Experience will teach you that it lifts man from the dust and makes him walk truthfully and courageously. Walk thus, my son, and others will follow.

THE YOUTH. But if religion does this, why do men ever neglect it?

THE MOTHER. Have you not heard that some love darkness more than light? Many have no desire, others fear some sacrifice, and others are groping, perplexed, waiting for a leader. That leader must be youth consecrated and youth enlightened. See how these candles burn again. So you must light men's hearts.

THE YOUTH. I'll try.

THE MOTHER. Make worship beautiful and it will prove enriching. Kneel here before the altar. (*The YOUTH kneels. Far in the distance a choir is heard singing.*) God made all things to be beautiful. Let men come here in reverence, hungering for beauty, leaving behind everything that is unclean. Have you not heard it said:

“Oh well for him whose will is strong!

He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong;

For him nor moves the loud world's random mock,

Nor all calamity's hugest waves confound;
He is a promontory rock,
That, compassed round with turbulent sound,
In middle ocean meets the surging shock,
Tempest-buffed, citadel-crowned."

THE YOUTH. God make me strong, and worthy of the tasks that wait my hand.

(*The choir continues singing for a moment, then there is silence. The MOTHER retreats a step into the shadows.*)

FIRST FIGURE. I wonder if he knows what he is asking. To bring men back to true Christianity will mean a struggle.

SECOND FIGURE. But see how deeply the right use of a chapel stirs the heart.

FIRST FIGURE. Let us press in upon him closer. (*They advance toward the YOUTH and take their places very close to him.*) Look out across America and see the scattered faiths — see discord and division — men walk like sheep without a shepherd; and you — you are but a youth.

SECOND FIGURE. It is far easier to light candles than to light men's hearts. Once a young man tried to bring men back to God and they led him out to Calvary. (*The YOUTH has risen.*)

THE YOUTH. But it is our task to make America's churches great!

FIRST FIGURE. Give that task to bolder hands.

SECOND FIGURE. What do you know of creeds or doctrines? What answers will you give to skeptics? What will you say to those who mock at faith?

FIRST FIGURE. See how small you really are!

THE YOUTH. Youth will find a way!

FIRST FIGURE (*angrily*). You speak boldly because you are in the chapel and your mother is near. Wait until you get outside and the air of the street strikes your face. Wait until the world swallows you. Wait until men laugh and hold you up to ridicule.

SECOND FIGURE (*laying a hand on the YOUTH*). Some will lay their hands on you like this and cry, "Fanatic!" "Christian!" Think of that day!

FIRST FIGURE. And others will go on as before. . . . Do you owe America this much?

THE YOUTH (*faltering*). I owe God everything.

FIRST FIGURE (*laying his hand on him*). See, you are afraid! No wonder! It will take a revolution, not a vision, to make men stop and think of God!

SECOND FIGURE. Go back to your home! Forget the challenge that has come to you.

FIRST FIGURE. Let someone else first put his hand to this task. Turn back, youth!

FIRST and SECOND FIGURES. Turn back!

THE YOUTH (*freeing himself from them*). No! (*He stands, defiant, but fearful, facing the FIGURES.*)

THE MOTHER (*coming to him*). What is it?

THE YOUTH. They laid hold on me and told me to turn back!

THE MOTHER. You heard that?

THE YOUTH. They were close upon me and shut out the light.

THE MOTHER. Do not be afraid.

THE YOUTH. I wonder if I can do anything. . . .

THE MOTHER. You are my son!

THE YOUTH. But am I not small — and alone?

(*The VISITOR, a commanding figure in white, appears.*)

THE MOTHER. Who are you?

THE VISITOR. I am the spirit of those who have believed, the spirit of those who dared in the past what youth must dare in the present. I am the memory of the faithful upon whose ideals our churches and our nation have been built.

THE MOTHER. You are more than welcome.

THE VISITOR. I have come to give my hand to youth. I have come to banish thoughts that would hold youth back from his endeavor. (*During the following lines the two FIGURES gradu-*

ally withdraw and disappear.) We, too, in our age, were often perplexed and seemingly defeated. But now we know that our efforts were not in vain. Now we know that our visions and our deeds still move silently throughout America and keep her secure.

THE YOUTH. Then you will help me? If I can feel that I am not alone, that I have the memory of the past and the vision of the future to help me —

THE VISITOR. Here! (*He extends his hand. The YOUTH takes it firmly.*) I will never forsake you. Therefore, take heart! You will often be appalled at the pettiness of man's dreams. You will see how he is content with sand while fields rich for harvest wait. You will see how some have their little toys of wealth and power and ask no more. But everywhere there are those who long to drink of the deeper life, who dare look up to God.

THE MOTHER. Pray that my son may be like one of them! I, too, will walk beside him.

THE VISITOR. There have always been those who have reached beyond creeds for a religion that would prove enriching in the present day. There have always been those not content with being men, but eager to be masters. There have been those in every age who sought something to love, something to do, and something for which to hope.

THE YOUTH. And one day, perhaps, all youths of Christendom will join hands and go forward in that thought. And out of it will grow a common work, a common hope, and an allegiance to one Father — God.

(*A cross flames above the altar. The trio turns and kneels before it. The choir is heard nearer than before. The lights fade out.*)

SUGGESTED WORSHIP PROGRAM

ORGAN PRELUDE: "Pilgrim's Progress" (III) *Austin*

INVOCATION

Dear Father, we who look to the future ask for thy guidance. A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past. From the wisdom of ages past help us to shape our future. Give us eyes and hearts of stability in a day of turmoil and conflict. Temper our ambition with the peace which comes from above. Amen.

— *Ernest W. Shurtleff*

HYMN: "Lead on, O King Eternal"

RESPONSIVE READING

Leader:

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless sea;
Day by day his sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow me."

Congregation: If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall find it.

Leader:

Jesus calls us, from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."

Congregation: Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust

doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal; for where your treasure is, there is your heart also.

Leader:

In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still he calls in cares and pleasures,
“Christian, love me more than these.”

Congregation: Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Leader:

Jesus calls us. By thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thine obedience,
Serve and love thee best of all.

— *Arr. by Cecil F. Alexander.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER, *in unison*

CHOIR RESPONSE

OFFERTORY SOLO: “Today if Ye will Hear my Voice” *Rogers*

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matt. 19:16–30

HYMN: “Truehearted, Wholehearted” *Havergal*

PRESENTATION OF THE DRAMA

BENEDICTION, *to be pronounced as the altar cross is illuminated:*

And now may the beauty of great art, the inspiration of noble thought, and the ecstasy of Christian vision remain a part of your lives. Amen.

— *Neil Crawford*

ORGAN POSTLUDE: “Recessional” *Coerne*

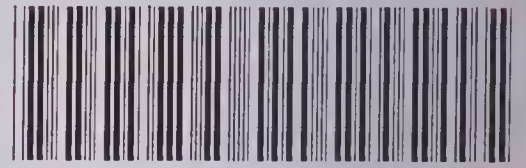








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